



**The World Social Forum
Through the Eyes of
Movement
Groups in India**

Mamata Dash



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About the Paper

This research looks at popular notions, beliefs and practices related to the World Social Forum from the points of view of people's movement groups in India. It is a discussion around their struggles, and the nature and extent of their engagement with, support for and strength from the World Social Forum. It documents how these groups have viewed the WSF, their experiences in participating or not participating in it, whether and how it has helped in furthering their struggles on the ground and their expectations from such a vast forum.

Based on discussions with the representatives and key individuals of seven people's movement groups working with indigenous communities, Dalit and landless masses, communities fighting against global capital and imperialist forces and for larger socio-economic and political space in the country it raises the questions of how do these people's movement understand the World Social Forum? What significance does the World Social Forum hold for people and activists who face the threat of state repression? To what extent has the World Social Forum, as an open space, or as a movement, or a process, helped in fostering these communities' struggle for larger socio-political and economic space? What has a process, an event, and a movement like the World Social Forum meant for all the struggling masses? How do groups who have waged valiant battles to protect their socio-political identities find themselves in the space the World Social Forum offers?

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The Backdrop

The beginning of the World Social Forum (2001) was marked by an annual vent at Porto Alegre in Brazil, strategically timed with the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland. The journey so far has moved from being an open challenge against globalisation to a call for alternatives and visualising 'another world is possible' (2002). The steady growth in numbers attending the world event¹ demonstrates the relevance of the Forum all across the globe. This global nature of participation in the WSF and the realisation that there is a need to build strategies to fight against global powers led the International Council (IC) to take the WSF outside Brazil, to India. The objective was to be more inclusive of those on whom the brunt of imperialist and neoliberal globalisation was the most severe, and also to take the process where there has been popular resistance against these forces.

Drawing from the global charter of principles, the WSF in India set out to create a space for all sections of society, opening a dialogue within and between a broad spectrum of political parties, social movements and organisations. It was visualised as a platform for the assertion of rights and a world free of violence, hunger and discrimination. The WSF charter of principles defines the desired characteristics of the Forum and the most common elements describe it as an open space, a process, a movement and so on. There also exists a perception that the WSF has been a participatory process, particularly in India where efforts have been made to make it a bottom-up process, facilitating the formation of social forums in Indian states, districts and towns.

¹ 25,000-30,000 in the first WSF, 50,000-60,000 in the second, and 100,000 in the third. Sen and Kumar 2003.

In this research, I have attempted to look at these popular notions/beliefs/practices from the points of view of people's movement groups². The overall objectives of this research have been to enquire into the nature and extent of engagement in the WSF by these groups fighting for larger socio-economic and political space in the country. The people's movement-based groups covered in this research are working with indigenous communities, Dalit and landless masses, communities fighting against global capital and imperialist forces, and the like. I have largely focused this research on documenting how these groups have viewed the WSF, their experiences in participating or not participating in it, whether and how it has helped in furthering their struggles on the ground and their expectations from such a vast forum.

I have held in-depth discussions with the representatives of seven people's movement-based groups³ (all rural) and have had one-on-one interactions with key individuals of such groups who have also been part of the WSF. Secondary sources of information have also been used, such as books/articles/memoirs/critiques written by people who follow the larger process and hold opinions about the WSF.

Although plans for the personal interactions often did get disturbed due to certain unsettling situations⁴ related to the larger repressive measures adopted by the state, these disturbances only served to provide more food for thought for this research. Some of these reflections were around the questions: What significance does the WSF hold for people/activists who face the threat of state repression? To what extent has the WSF, as an open space or as a movement or a process, helped in fostering these communities' struggle for larger socio-political and economic space? I tried to visualise what a process/event/movement like the WSF has meant, for instance, for all the struggling masses of the Indravati, who

² People's movement-based groups in this context are those entities that have evolved as a reaction to oppression by the state and have built resistance against the same. These entities are led by local people who are faced with oppression, discrimination and alienation.

³ They include Prakrutika Sampada Suraksha Parishad (PSSP) Orissa, Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti (NSS) Orissa, Lower Sukhtel Budi Anchal Sangram Parishad (LSBASP) Orissa, Paschim Orissa Krushaka Samanwaya Sangram Samiti (POKSSS) Orissa, National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) Jharkhand, Jangal Bachao Andolan (JJBA) Jharkhand, and BAMCEF Orissa.

⁴ The volatile situation prevalent in many states such as Orissa, Chattisgarh and others, made it impossible for me to meet some of the identified groups. One was the Visthapan Virodhi Manch (VVM), Kalinganagar, Orissa. The police had fired at two key workers of the VVM the same morning I was supposed to meet them. Likewise, the police picked up one of the leaders of Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti (NSS) in Orissa the day before he was to join us in the mountain.

faced displacement due to a multipurpose major dam project in the eighties and nineties, and many of whom are living in the mid-reservoir area surrounded by deep waters but have not been able to mobilise themselves into a movement group. Likewise, how does the adivasi struggle understand the WSF; or how do groups who have waged valiant battles in the past against MNCs to protect their socio-political identities find themselves in the space the WSF offers? There were many such questions in my mind when I set out to do this research, which have multiplied as well as deepened during the course of this research.

I have used both formal and informal approaches to draw information from groups and individuals. I kept the discussions largely around their struggles, and the nature and extent of their engagement with, support for and strength from the WSF. A set of pointers were used to keep the discussions focused around the key research components.

It is worth noting here that many of the discussions with the activists were held during their campaign work; this essentially meant joining the activists and travelling (or rather, trekking) with them in their respective field areas to get their views. In retrospect, it can be said that this process helped in contextualising the issues raised or shared by them as regards the WSF.

Revisiting Concepts and Notions

Interactions with various groups and individuals, and literatures referred to during the research, invited a reappraisal of some commonly accepted concepts and notions about the WSF.

Open Space or Organisation?

Whether the WSF is an open space or a larger umbrella organisation remained a much-debated question with varied opinions and perceptions. One of the principles in the WSF charter clearly defines it as an open space for different ideas, views, experiences and lessons. According to Amit Sengupta of Delhi Science Forum and an erstwhile IOC (International Organising Committee) member, "the WSF concept of open space is not located in a vacuum but in an opposition to imperialist globalisation. The WSF space is not one where the 'WSF organisers' are privileged but where resistance and movements are fore-grounded as the leaders of

the global resistance to globalisation. These could encompass not one resistance but diverse resistances and multiple alliances: either issue-based or larger ideological alliances." Thus, it professes to be a space where multiple ideas against neoliberal economy can brew and bear fruit. Meena Menon of the Focus of the Global South holds similar views when she says that "the WSF is open for one and all; anybody could come and participate in it. It [does] not require any invitation"⁵ .

Those who are involved in the organising committee feel that the WSF is not an organisation as it does not prescribe a position or have a locus standi. Its ideological positioning is spelt out in the charter, which offers the "opportunity for contending or dissimilar ideological positions to be debated, discussed or shared". One of the members of the IOC remarks:

[B]ecause the WSF has no position of its own, it is not meant to lead the struggle against imperialist globalisation, or against militarism, or patriarchy, or casteism, or whatever. The WSF just provides the space for people who are in these struggles to come together and share their varying experiences. In some cases this might lead to forging of common struggles based on a common understanding; in [other] cases it might just remain at the level of sharing of experiences and views. Whatever may be the outcome, the WSF's role is limited to providing the space; it does not direct how this space will be used by people who come together.

There are also those who doubt if the WSF is as open as it claims to be. In *The World Social Forum: An Open Space or a Movement of Movements?*, Heikki Patomäki and Teivo Teivainen have discussed a range of observations around this aspect made by some of those who have played crucial roles in the WSF over time. A part of the discussion is represented below, which reflects the conceptual journeys of arriving at widely differing opinions (as discussed at a later stage in this paper):

As one of the architects of the conception of open space, Chico Whitaker stressed the dangers of either falling back to the past

⁵ Personal communication

of Leninist vanguardism or degenerating into absolute dispersion. The open space method is meant to overcome this choice. Jai Sen, however, argued that the WSF is not genuinely open. Even its minimal political programme excludes a number of concerns and individuals; in fact, no space can be neutral. Sen would like to open up the forum to everyone. Virginia Vargas countered this by saying that she does not accept the idea of allowing in, for instance, rightwing religious fundamentalists. Meena Menon, in turn, ridiculed the idea that open space is a postmodern concept. The method of the WSF is not a philosophical but a practical question. The open space of the WSF works well in bringing the activists together and that is its justification. Anibal Quijano made the qualification that the WSF also facilitates debates between those who disagree. For Wallerstein, the WSF is a method for getting different anti-systemic movements together. Wallerstein criticised the democratic deficit of the WSF but not the method of open space as such. There is a need for both open space and real political outcomes. Therefore, the WSF should explicitly allow for organising action-oriented networks and even facilitate their actions.⁶

While this description includes different positions on the WSF as an 'open space', there seem to be further departures in perceptions among others. For instance, Jai Sen has a larger comment to make:

[T]he Forum - not only the annual world events but also the regional events and, most importantly, the online and larger 'World Social Forum' that is taking place 365 days a year - is 'successful' because *it is acting as a public space* where countless people all over the world who are aware of and concerned by what they see going on around them, are being able to converge, meet, exchange⁷.

With the starting point of opposing globalisation in general, the WSF has enlarged its arena to include a wide range of issues such as caste, communalism, patriarchy and so on, apart from opening up to a varied

⁶ Excerpts from Patomaki and Teivainen 2004

⁷ Sen 2007

range of organisations of Dalits and tribals. That the journey from an annual event to polycentric social forums reflects the nature of open space and not that of an organisation, was the consensus among many during the discussions.

For many groups, the WSF has created a platform to meet groups and organisations engaged in similar political struggles. According to them, this has reinforced the strength and confidence that they are not alone in this struggle. According to Munni Lal, Convener of the NFFPFW⁸, "WSF Mumbai gave us an opportunity to see so many groups like us fighting for forest land rights, and that gave me confidence that my issue is not isolated but is a world issue and I am not alone in this."⁹ This view is shared by Ashok Chowdhury, one of the founder members of the NFFPFW and senior forest rights activist in the country:

Forest peoples in this country are isolated. Here at the WSF, they were empowered and felt that they are not alone in the world, that there are many others like them and the same types of problems are faced by people all over the world. Listening to people from Uruguay and Brazil talk about their lands being encroached, our people said that it was like they were telling our story. The unorganised workers who went to the WSF came back charged with a positive vision that 'another world is possible'. They said that if the WSF can do this, why can't our government?¹⁰

Amit Sengupta characterises the WSF as having "provided a broad anti-globalisation platform that we can build on; it was a place for people to come together and develop a wish list of activities"¹¹

But everybody does not share this view. There are critics who doubt how open the WSF can really be as long as it is managed by NGOs who are party to the imperialist practices! According to Debaranjan, an activist

⁸ NFFPFW is a platform working towards greater socio-political rights for the forest dwellers in the country. Around 2000 people from NFFPFW participated in the Mumbai WSF.

⁹ Personal communication

¹⁰ Refer to Guttal 2005

¹¹ Ibid

who is associated with the Prakrutika Sampada Suraksha Parishad (PSSP)¹², Orissa, "the WSF is an organised strategy to diffuse the energy of those fighting against the imperialist regime. How can a fund-driven effort provide an open space?"¹³ This is echoed by Abhiram Mullick of BAMCEF Orissa, an organisation working for the rights of Dalits in the country.

These diametrically opposite viewpoints bring up the question of whether the WSF has really been open, whether it has really facilitated the participation of groups of all sizes. For members of groups like the Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti (NSS)¹⁴ or Lower Sukhtel Budi Anchal Sangram Parishad (LSBASP)¹⁵, the very term 'WSF' was something they were hearing for the first time during this research¹⁶. These are the groups at the ground level who may not know what the WSF is all about but are none the less grounded in the objective of protecting their socio-economic-political space against the invasions of imperialist forces. This is where one is tempted to go with the critics - the question of why such groups have remained outside the WSF ambit! Is it because of the structure of the Forum or has it to do with the system of organisation?

Many respondents point to the process that goes behind organising the WSF. Who decides who should participate and who should not? Does it have nothing to do with resources and who manages them? Many feel that those in the know are responsible for ensuring the presence of activists working in the field. This is where the first difficulty is encountered.

Although there have been all sorts of mechanisms to establish a democratic and transparent system, it is equally true that there have always been a few who end up managing it all, however well-intentioned they may be. The IWC (India Working Committee) meeting reports and other records suggest that it was almost always the same handful of people who juggled

¹² PSSP has been at the forefront of the Kashipur struggle against mining by the Utkal Alumina India Limited for the last 14 years and has been an example of people's struggle in the country.

¹³ Personal communication

¹⁴ NSS has been fighting against Vedanta's Bauxite Mining project in Niyamgiri in Orissa since 2001.

¹⁵ LBASP has been strongly opposing the World Bank's Dam project in Balangir district in Orissa.

¹⁶ One document containing a sort of timeline about major activities of the NSS mentions that people from Niyamgiri went to the Mumbai WSF but neither the leadership nor the villagers in Niyamgiri confirmed this. It is noteworthy here that this document in Oriya was prepared by those who have drifted away from the NSS due to internal problems (read, were asked to leave the NSS).

between themselves the different responsibilities. And the most striking thing about it is that most of them were not from the communities that are facing the brunt of hunger, discrimination and despair.

Working around the differences, finding common grounds and sustaining them have not been easy for many. If on the one hand the notion of open space is criticised for lack of sensitivity towards the not-so-articulate lot, on the other hand this very space has seen the coming together of opposite or varied forces, even if for short whiles. As Shalmali Guttal describes it:

[T]he most commonly cited impact of the WSF process in India is that it brought together different types of movements, organisations and networks from different political and ideological streams, and facilitated the process of people talking to each other, sharing the strategies and substances of their struggles, and planning actions towards common causes.¹⁷

The groups who have participated a couple of times in the WSF process in India wonder why others are not party to the process. If the process is truly about alliance building and meeting grounds, why is it not adopting a structure that facilitates the involvement of small and not-so-well-connected groups?

Many groups are unaware not only of the Mumbai WSF (2004) or the Delhi ISF (2006), but also of the programmes planned for the Global Action Day (GDA). If awareness is so poor, how is the WSF to reach the core of the struggle areas or groups? Meena Menon comments on this situation: The memory of the WSF has faded with time; four long years since we had [the] Mumbai WSF, and there is very little that's happening around the WSF. This year's GDA got a very poor response. In fact, if at all anything happened, it was only in Mumbai.¹⁸

Activities have been very sporadic and limited to groups with resources.

¹⁷ Guttal 2005

¹⁸ Personal communication

Event or Process?

The WSF process in India, whether in the shape of the ASF¹⁹ or WSF 2004 or ISF 2006, has seen large participation from organisations representing the underprivileged classes such as Dalits, women, tribals and so on. Enough has been written about Mumbai WSF as a 'colourful event' where 'people danced and sang', and which was dominated by rallies by the tribals, Dalits and women. But who were the ones who could make it to this WSF and what happened to all the euphoria generated by these events? Does it mean that the WSF has penetrated to the core of the struggling masses of this country? There is a mixed response to this question-some common views and some diametrically opposite ones.

The WSF India charter of principles states that "the WSF becomes a *permanent process* of seeking and building alternatives, which can not be reduced to the event supporting it". But is this support of alternative voices due to the event and its space, or to a certain process? Is the large participation an outcome of a process on the ground? Is it permanent or momentary?

There are observations suggesting that the WSF is more 'permanent' and 'a process', as it takes place every year, and now with a polycentric framework several times a year in a sustained manner. According to Jai Sen, it is

thereby allowing the potential of sustained exchange. Indeed, by having these features, it is perhaps contributing strongly to the emergence of a certain culture of doing things - in this case, a culture of more open, horizontal social relations and politics.²⁰

Amit Sengupta presents a contrary view:

The WSF was conceived as an event. In fact, the Charter of Principles reflects this original intent. Since then, the WSF has grown in its expanse and reach enormously. While a considerable

¹⁹ The Asia Social Forum was held in Hyderabad in 2003.

²⁰ Sen 2007

effort has been expended in expanding the reach of the WSF, large parts of these efforts have been unplanned.

This is echoed by Meena Menon when she maintains that everybody works towards this 'event' and it is the event which mobilises and motivates people; and once the event is over, people disperse and it is up to them to carry the discussions forward. According to her the WSF is not something which has been designed to happen in a particular manner; it is an attempt to get the critical issues into the public domain for discussion, debate, agreeing, disagreeing and so on.

Let us try and understand how different people have understood this question. For many of them - the rural Dalits, landless tribals and so on - the mobilisation was to attend a programme in Mumbai or in Delhi. Those who are a little more articulate say that the programmes helped them to see so many people in the same situation. The middle class activists facilitating campaigns at the ground see it a little differently. For them, there was a lot of sharing on the ground after ASF 2003, WSF 2004 and ISF 2006, and thereby it has been a process. But if it was a process, to which parties has it been restricted? How did it fail to include many groups from across the country? It cannot be that their struggles are in any way less important than others. For example, the groups in Orissa could not participate simply because nobody ever told them about the WSF and what it stands for. So were they part of a process? It has been a process perhaps for those who were part of, associated with, or known to the organising committee.

Groups and individuals who chose to stay away or have been part of the resistance groups say that it was a one-time event where people were asked to 'perform'. It certainly brought people together during the event, but there was very little in the way of a joint programme for action that emerged from this togetherness.

However, the NFFPFW saw the beginning of a collective struggle for the protection of rights of forest dwellers, with many groups across the globe joining in and giving momentum to this process. It culminated in declaring a joint struggle for greater political space for forest dwellers through the Mumbai Forest Rights Initiative Declaration. This was further sharpened in Porto Alegre.

But how many of those who attended the WSF hold similar views? Not many, and in the evaluation process many in the IWC also agreed that while individuals from different groups participated, the participation of movement groups in the process was not a success.

One of the few urban-based women's organisations²¹ that participated in ASF 2003 stayed away from WSF 2004 as it did not see any 'utility' in, nor did it have the 'resources' for, participating. For them, it was just a *mela*²² and they felt they had much more critical issues to address than attending a *mela*. After much debate within the organisation and with others, they were again motivated to participate in ISF 2006, but the half-heartedness was visible. The fact that there were no 'take-aways' for the organisation suggests that the WSF is seen more as an event than as a process by this organisation.

The genesis of the WSF is viewed in terms of a counter event to the World Economic Forum. So, it is not entirely wrong to understand the WSF as an event aimed towards creating a collective voice against global powers. Likewise, in WSF Mumbai, Mumbai Resistance came up as an event to counter the WSF on the ground that "the WSF was not open to all forms of struggle", as evidenced in Article 9²³ of the WSF charter of principles. The fact that two principal communist parties in India were involved in the WSF, apart from key individuals in the WSF having clear party leanings, went contrary to the charter of principles. And the voice of dissent against the WSF had some grounding on that front.

It remains a fact that there is very little happening around the WSF in India now, except some sporadic participation by a few - mostly those who have been at the helm of affairs of the WSF - in programmes related to the WSF around the globe. This has left very little space for new members to get involved in India, even though it is remarked in many a literature that no one is a leader in the WSF and that it does not follow any hierarchical order. The forum has remained confined to a select few. This can be partially assessed from the fact that out of the seven groups

²¹ The description is not drawn from any formal interaction during the research but has been taken from earlier interactions on this issue over a period of time.

²² Mela is used to refer to a big gathering with purpose of celebration, enjoyment and socialising.

²³ Article 9 states that military organisations and representatives of political parties cannot participate in the WSF.

contacted for this research, only two have participated to some extent, two are oblivious to the existence of the WSF, while three stayed out of it.

The WSF as a 'Movement'

It is a well-known fact that organising the WSF involves massive planning and huge financial resources, apart from time, energy and human resources. Where do these financial resources come from? Certainly not from movement-based or even movement-oriented groups. The most common belief is that they come from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the critics maintain that there is a sort of 'invisible control' in their hands. This may not be entirely ill-founded as representatives of NGOs are better equipped to participate in the planning meeting, which leads to organising of the WSF event. However, in the case of the WSF in India, many have refuted this argument by saying that it was all managed by movement-based groups and trade unions. It is also learnt that this had led to aggressive discussions at various planning meetings before the Mumbai WSF.

This brings us to yet another much-contested term, 'movement', and the difference between NGOs and 'movements', and what may we mean by the WSF as a movement. Many have argued that the WSF has created a movement among the struggling masses as it is guided by a strong desire for change among the masses - changing the system, challenging the state. Like a movement, it has been a learning space where varied ideas, experiences and views have come together, and it has thus renewed the confidence and energy of the struggling groups.

But to what extent have people's movement-based groups been able to relate to the kind of 'movement' that is the WSF? There are mixed responses to this. Many have observed that it has reaffirmed their belief in different forces coming together as a collective. However, there is a strong contradictory voice to this, which views it as an NGO-led movement. In this view, NGOs have limited roles and boundaries and they are often not driven by a mass force. For example, it is difficult for an NGO to take a radical stand (which the WSF is expected to foster), but for movement-based groups it is the essence of their existence - to question irregularities and injustice, to demand and establish their rights. According to groups such as NSS, POKSSS and the like, a movement takes shape as a result of a mass consciousness and reaction to an unjust world/system/practices,

and the WSF has neither the mandate nor the capacity to contain and manage such an energy.

The pertinent question here is about the extent to which the WSF has helped the Adivasi movement, or the movement against multinationals, or the movement against land alienation, or the movement against discrimination in the country. Although groups fighting around these issues have participated in the WSF in large numbers, it was interesting to see a cross-section of views on this question.

For instance, the Adivasi struggle in the country is always linked to issues of 'production', and according to Sanjay Basu Mullick of Jharkhand Jangal Bachao Andolan and Convener of the NFFPFW

Adivasi groups say that another world already exists. Those who are saying 'another world is possible' are not able to see it. [The] Adivasi movement realises that the world will not be able to survive unless the repressive present world is replaced. But they are not too sure about the characteristics of the 'other world' that is talked about in the WSF - how is it going to look at Nature, as enemy or friend? - whether the 'other world' we are talking about will be able to address this contradiction.²⁴

So, even though individuals in the Adivasi struggle have participated in the WSF in large numbers in India, it is still unclear to them what exactly the WSF offers to their struggle.

Likewise, the groups in Orissa engaged in the struggle against the mining lobby, and facing increasing state repression, are not at all sure if the WSF will ever be able to become a movement. Their doubt stems from their understanding that it is largely an 'orchestrated affair' where there is very little scope for a political struggle. The fight against the state cannot be directed from the top; it has to be fought on the ground and the WSF does not have the character to initiate any kind of movement, to any extent. This is the stand reflected in the views of the representatives of POKSSS, LSBASP, PSSP and NSS.

²⁴ Personal communication

Gaps to be Bridged

The Forum has taken some initial steps to bring a cross-section of people together, somewhat facilitated a different look at issues, and provided some space for groups to forge new alliances and networks. It has tried to create a composite struggle recognising the uniqueness of each struggle and the political consciousness each of them embodies. In many ways, these challenges attempt to adapt universal strategies to get uniform results, something the world powers are busy developing. It recognises the fact that it is a diverse world and the diversity demands diverse ways of addressing issues. It also recognises the fact that there are commonalities in many struggles; for example, the impact of displacement due to a mega dam project will be similar to a great extent across regions and countries. The WSF, despite all its limitations, has been able to give new meaning to 'solidarity', apart from facilitating fruition of new alliances and platforms.

However, the discussion in the previous section also brings out the fact that the participation of people's movement-based groups or even grassroots groups was extremely limited, raising questions about inclusiveness. It would be wrong, for instance, to say that it has been able to reach people in villages, even though activists have been able to participate in the WSF in various ways. It is therefore doubtful how much it has been able to incorporate the political consciousness emerging from the people who are actually fighting for their rights, not just from those who are facilitating the process from a certain distance. The perspective of the Adivasi struggle elicits the fact that the vision of the people on the ground is very clear as far as the 'other world possible' is concerned, as they are already living in it. This depicts areas of disconnect between the local, the regional and the global.

The most immediate impression one gets here is that the momentum with which the WSF entered into India has somewhat dissipated. This disconnect was felt during discussions with the movement-based groups. The WSF does not seem to have provided to these groups the impetus that it talked about, and has remained more of an event than a process. The euphoria created by ASF 2003 reached its peak during Mumbai WSF, but the Global Action Day in January 2008 had very few takers. In fact, the enthusiasm was visibly declining by the time of ISF 2006, with limited participation. It is important to examine why such a unique concept came to such a pass.

The voice of dissent has always existed in India and there are many resistance forums and platforms created to synergise collective ideas, strengths, even limitations. In such a context, the WSF was initially seen as 'the Forum' to be in, which offered the 'open space' required to traverse the treacherous path strewn with ideological differences and oppositions. It promised a process for groups involved in struggles to engage in. But the reality looks somewhat different as it has remained confined to only a few groups, mostly those who have certain kinds of resources. The good intent of keeping the process transparent and democratic has not really paid off, not perhaps because of a failure of intention so much as an inadvertent intrusion of a certain autocracy.

Another issue that has kept the WSF from being a genuine process and an open space is that of 'funding'. All the activities under the WSF (ASF, WSF, ISF, GDA) have involved organising large events, with huge financial implications. The WSF has so far been dependent on external funding and this has been a bone of contention among its supporters and critics. There is not enough information across the spectrum about the source of such financial mobilisations as have taken place. Although there has been a lot of talk about the WSF approach being democratic, transparent, bottom-up and so on, it is yet to be entirely inclusive of struggles, or to recognise the grassroots political consciousness, or to follow a genuine democratic process - traits various grassroots movements have taught us are imperative, time and again.

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Ashok Pradhan, POKSSS, Sambalpur, Orissa; 8 March 2008

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Pareswar Thakur, LSBASP, GS Dungerepali, Balangir, Orissa; 12 March 2008

Lingraj Azad, NSS, Bissamcuttack, Rayagada, Orissa; 16 March 2008

Meena Menon, Focus on the Global South, New Delhi; 30 July 2008

Munni Lal, NFFPFW, multiple location and time

Saroj Mohanty, PSSP, Sambalpur, Orissa; 12 march 2008

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