

LOK SATTA
People Power

In Pursuit of Democratic Reforms – LOK SATTA's Experiences

10th - 11th May, 2003, ADR, Ahmedabad

The purpose of a government is to make it easy
for people to do good and difficult to do evil

- *Gladstone*

Indian Democracy – Impressive Record

Myron Weiner's Democratic Practices

- Competitive elections
- Political freedoms
- Peaceful transfer of power & due process
- Government accountable to people

Key Ingredients of Democracy

- Freedom
 - Self-Governance
 - Empowerment
 - Rule of Law
 - Self-correcting mechanisms
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Crisis of Governance

- Increasing lawlessness
 - Inefficient state apparatus
 - Unresponsive bureaucracy
 - Ineffective judicial system
 - All pervasive corruption
 - Criminalization of politics
 - Money and muscle power in elections
 - Political instability
 - Erosion of legitimacy of authority
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Macro Perspective of Indian Polity

- Disaggregate volatility
 - Broadly reflective of public opinion
 - Ruling parties and powerful candidates do lose
 - Rejection/Negative vote pretty common
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Micro Perspective of Indian Polity

- Money power dominant
 - Criminalization rampant
 - Voting irregularities frequent
 - People take money to vote
 - Caste and divisive impulses are prominent
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How is Democracy Surviving?

- A system of compensatory errors (competing distortions neutralize each other)
 - Strength of Election Commission
 - Tradition of Neutrality of Officials
 - Pre-polling process scrupulously fair (nominations, ballot papers, appointment of polling officials etc.)
 - Post-polling process - completely non-partisan (transport, storage and counting of ballots and declaration of results)
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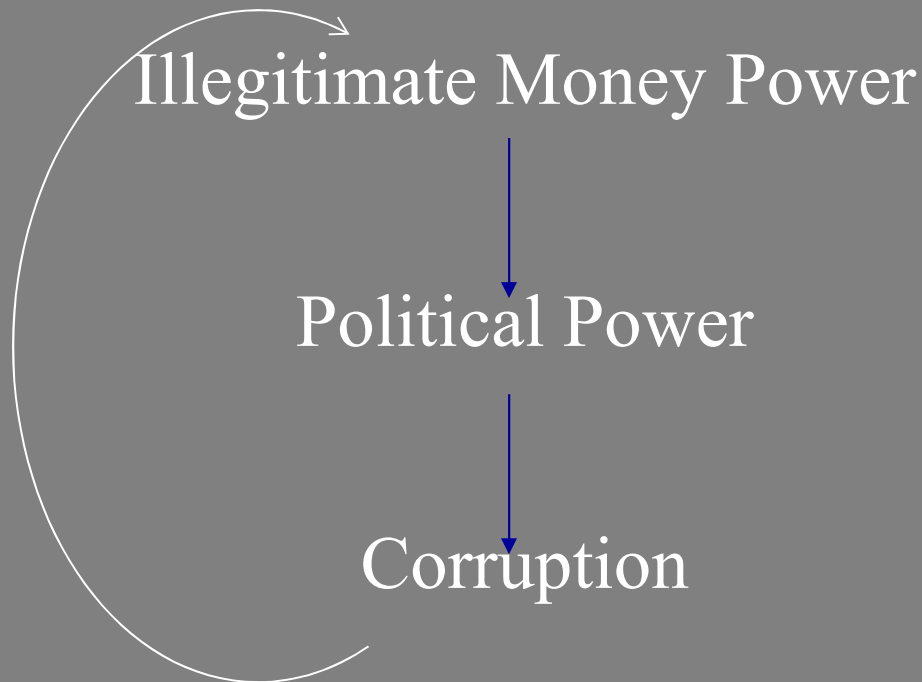
In a Sane Democracy

- Political process should resolve the crisis
 - Parties, elections and public office are the route to reform
 - In India a vicious cycle operates
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Failure of Political Process

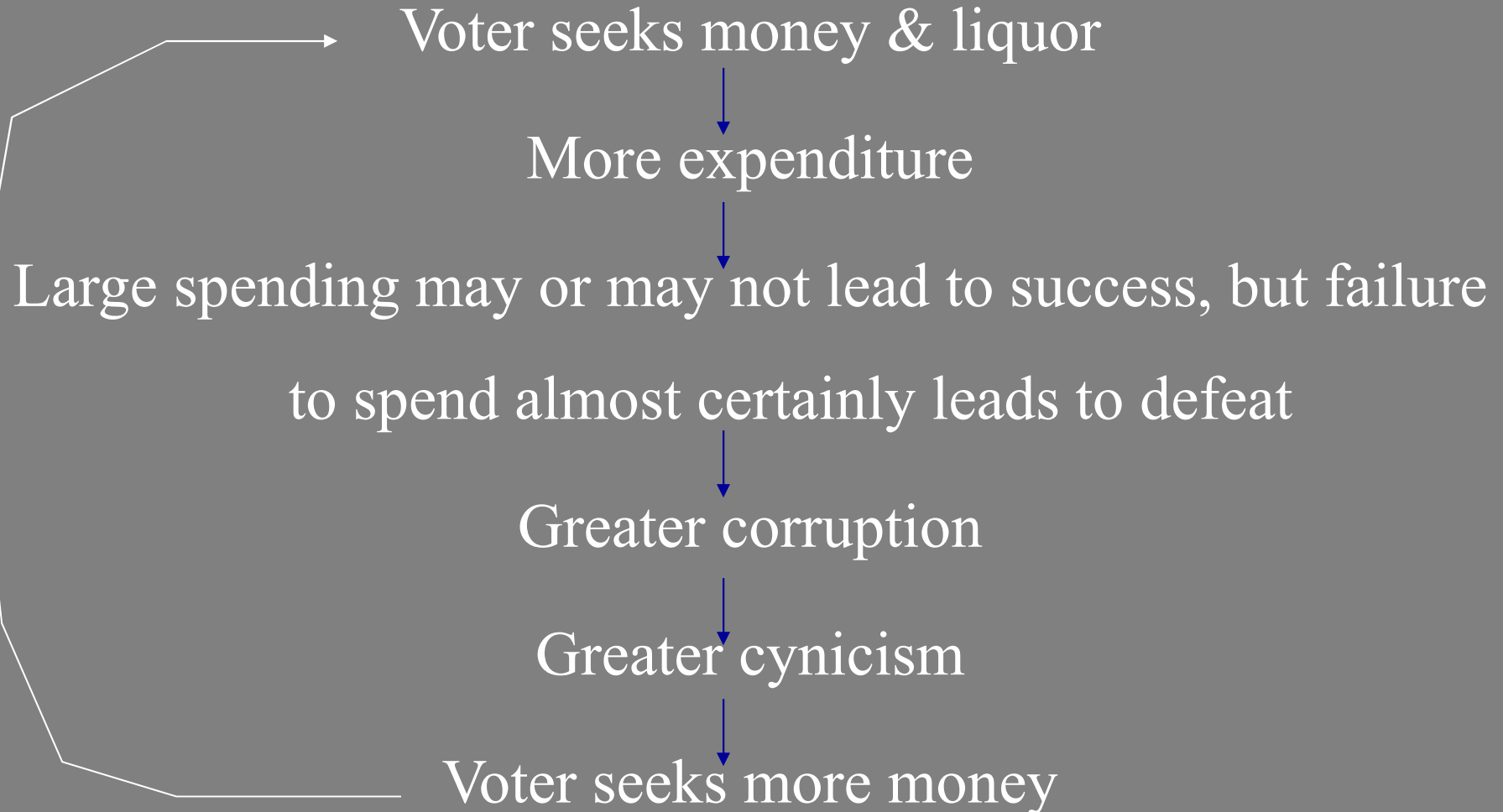
Interlocking vicious cycles

Inexhaustible demand for illegitimate funds



Interlocking Vicious Cycles

Most expenditure is to buy vote



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Rise of Political Fiefdoms

Need for money, caste and local clout



Parties are helpless in choice of candidates



Rise of political fiefdoms



Absence of internal party democracy



Competition among a few families in most constituencies



Oligopoly at constituency level

Vote delinked from public good

Centralized polity



No matter who wins, people lose



Vote does not promote public good



Voter maximizes short term gain



Money, liquor, caste, emotion and anger become dominant



Vicious cycle is perpetuated

Contd..

Interlocking Vicious Cycles Taxes delinked from services

Only 16 % of GDP collected as taxes (union & states)

Fiscal deficits and crisis

Higher Taxes

↓
Unacceptable because
of corruption and poor
services

Desubsidization

↓
The poor do not see
alternative benefits for
the subsidies given up

Wage Reduction

↓
Centralization and Art
311 preclude it

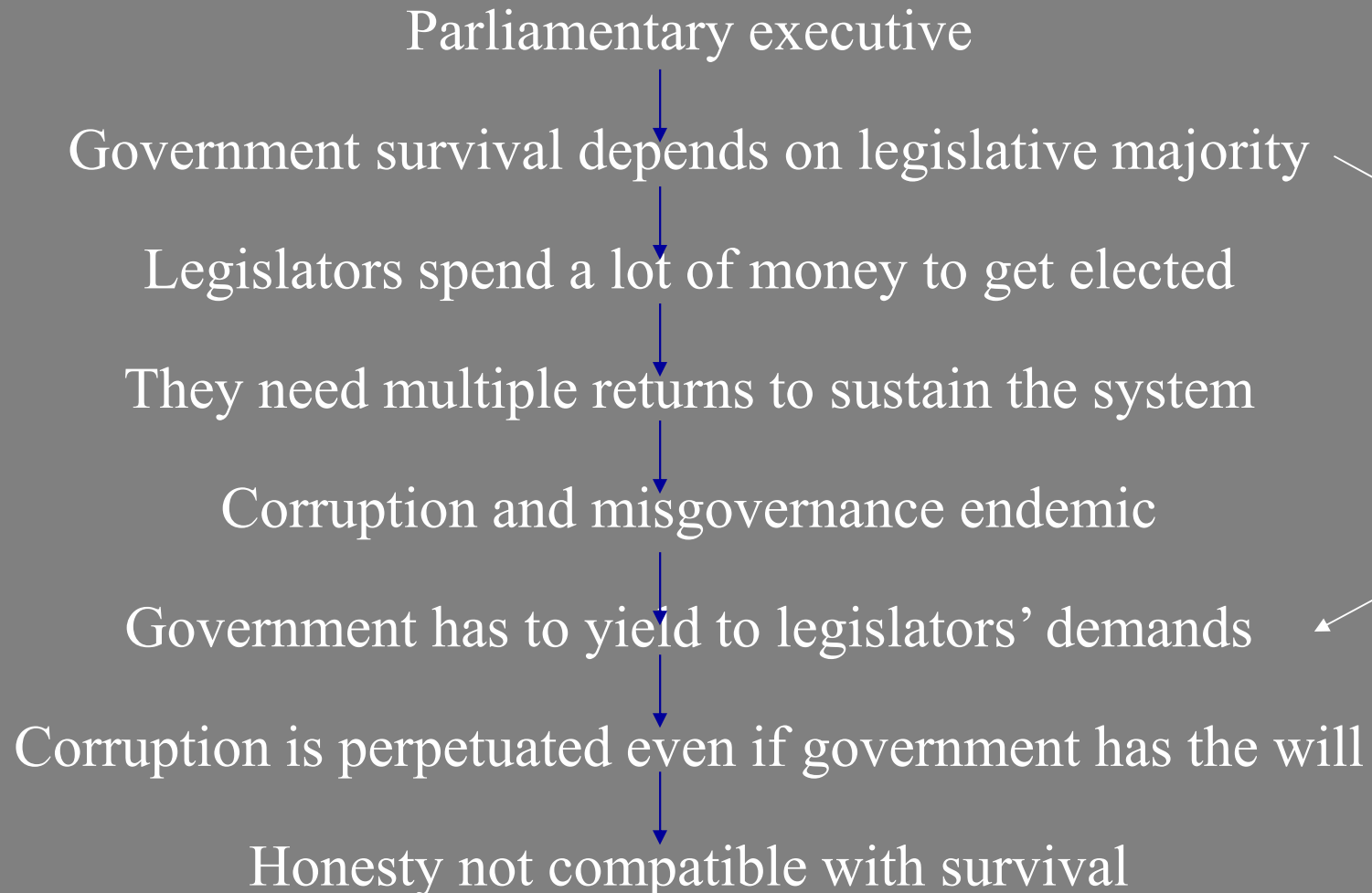
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Deeper fiscal crisis

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Poorer services and public goods

↓
Perpetuation of poverty and backwardness

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Political survival and honesty not compatible



Campaign Expenditure – Vicious Cycle

- Illegitimate expenses are often 5-10 times the ceiling or more
 - (Assembly ceiling: Rs 6 lakhs)
 - Lok Sabha ceiling: Rs 15 lakhs)
- Every crore spent illegitimately

Rs 10 crore returns

(to cover ROR, Interest, personal upkeep, supporters, family's future, next election costs)

Rs 100 crore collected through bureaucracy

(for every legislator, there are 2000 employees who need to collect 'rent')

people suffer ten times more.

Payment extorted, on pain of delay, harassment, humiliation, anxiety and greater loss

Governance at a Glance

- Governments spend Rs. 1800 crores every day
 - Out of 27 million organised workers, government employs 70%
 - Fiscal deficit (Union and States) remains at 10 % GDP
 - 50% Union tax revenues go towards interest payment
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Is Money the Issue?

Sanitation

- 140 million toilets needed
- Cost: Rs 35000 crores
- Equals just 20 days expenditure

School Education

- 1.6 million class rooms needed
 - Capital cost : Rs 16,000 crores – 9 days govt. expenditure
 - Recurring expenditure : Rs.8000 crores – 5 days govt. expenditure
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Irreducible Role of Government

- Public order
- Rule of law
- Justice
- School education
- Healthcare
- Infrastructure
- Natural resource development
- Social security

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Way Out

- Assert people's sovereignty
 - Fundamental democratic transformation
 - People centered governance
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Key Governance Reforms


- Comprehensive electoral reforms
 - Empowerment of local governments
 - Instruments of accountability
 - Speedy and efficient justice
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Electoral Reforms


- Process Improvements
 - Preventing polling irregularities
 - Arresting and reversing criminalization of politics
 - Checking abuse of unaccountable money power in elections
 - System Improvements
 - Political party reform
 - Proportional representation
 - Direct election of Chief Executive at the State level with clear separation of powers
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Empowerment of Local Governments

- Transfer of funds, functions and functionaries to local governments
- Link between

vote  public good

taxes  services

authority  accountability

Instruments of Accountability

- Right to Information
 - Independent crime investigation
 - Independent appointment of constitutional functionaries
 - Independent and effective anti-corruption agency
 - Term limits for public office
 - Strict penalties for abuse of office
 - Citizen's Charters
 - Stakeholder empowerment
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Judicial Reforms

- Limit writ jurisdiction
 - Increase number of courts
 - Local courts in local language (Gram Nyayalaya)
 - Time bound justice
 - National Judicial Commission
 - Independent crime investigation
 - All India Judicial Service
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What can Civil Society do?

- When political process fails, the ball is with citizens,
the ultimate sovereigns
 - Local assertion
 - State-level reforms
 - National platform for larger reforms
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What can Citizens do?

- Resist misgovernance
 - Check corruption
 - Influence public discourse
 - Channel resources better
 - Enforce better services
 - Bring pressure for reforms
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Approaches to Citizens' Action

- Collective, informed assertion
 - Wide dissemination of information
 - Effective mass communication
 - Strategic intervention
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Conditions for State-wide Movement

- A group of credible citizens with excellent track record
- Insights to political and governance process
- A practical agenda which unites all segments
- Professional, full-time, institutional approach

Methods of Citizens' Action- People's Watch

Collective, informed assertion

Tools :

- A people's charter in local language
- A common platform with name recognition
- Establishment of citizen centres

Advocacy for State and Local Goals

- Implementation of Right to Information
- Citizen's charters with penalties
- Empowerment of local governments

Contd..

Advocacy for State and Local Goals

- Empowerment of stake holders (water users, schools, market committees, fair price shops)
- Empowerment of ward committees
- Grama / Nagara Nyayalayas for speedy justice

Advocacy for State and Local Goals

- Monitoring of meters in petrol stations
 - Focus on delivery of school education and health care
 - Police reforms at state level
 - Monitoring of government programmes
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Election Watch

- Verification of electoral rolls
 - Advocacy for specific electoral reforms
 - Election-related activities
 - Know your candidate
 - Screening for criminal record
 - Common platforms
 - Go out and vote campaign
 - Monitoring of polling
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Impact of LOK SATTA

- Citizen's Charters – introduced in 9 departments by AP government
- Citizen's Charter for Municipalities in AP – LOK SATTA's creation – provides for compensation of Rs. 50/- day for delay in services – first in India
- Cessation of short delivery at petrol stations all over A.P. – benefit of Rs 1 crore / day
- Stakeholders' empowerment – laws enacted in the State to constitute water user associations and school education committees

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Impact of LOK SATTA

- Toilets for every household – largely on LOK SATTA's advocacy over 2 million toilets were built in the last 3 years
- Stopped enactment of a restrictive Societies Law and ensured passing of an enabling law (in collaboration with CDF)
- Several local successes
eg: Building regularization scheme - Kukatpally /
Successful fight against central excise corruption in small industries in AP

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Impact of LOK SATTA

- LOK SATTA created wide public awareness on the necessity for a Right to Information law in the state to increase transparency in government.
- Election Watch – arresting growth of criminal elements in politics
eg: Could influence selection of candidate for ZP chairperson in Kurnool district through public pressure
- LOK SATTA's advocacy made common electoral rolls for local, State and national elections a reality

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Impact of LOK SATTA

- At State level, Tendered Vote is now accepted as proof of rigging and repoll is ordered
- Altered the nature of debate on power sector reforms. Our proposal for micro privatization of distribution is accepted and adopted by the state government. LOK SATTA has emerged as one of the most authoritative and authentic voices on power sector reforms in the country.

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Impact of LOK SATTA

- Emerged as a powerful advocate for genuine decentralization and empowerment of local governments.
- LOK SATTA emerged as a powerful civil society platform to give voice to people's concerns.
- LOK SATTA is the largest people's movement in AP reaching out to almost 35% of the state's population.

Impact of LOK SATTA at the National Level

- LOK SATTA was instrumental in putting Electoral Reforms on the national agenda.
- LOK SATTA's surveys influenced Election Commission to accept in principle to make post office nodal agency for voter registration.
- Effectively lobbied for right to information and political funding legislations.
- Altered the nature of debate on women's reservation. Any new law will be on the lines suggested by LOK SATTA.

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Impact of LOK SATTA at the National Level

- Election Watch made disclosures a dominant public issue leading to litigation and judicial verdicts
 - Spearheading the National Campaign for Electoral Reforms eg., the recent candidate disclosures issues
 - Emerged as a leading think tank on governance reforms in the country.
 - Resulted in a viable National campaign for Electoral and Governance Reforms.
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Advocacy Issues

- Short Term (advanced stage)
 - Post office as nodal agency for voter registration
 - Disclosure of financial details of candidates
 - Political funding law
 - Tendered votes as a ground for automatic repolling

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Advocacy Issues

- Short Term (advanced stage)
 - National judicial commission
 - A law for local courts in every state
 - One for every 25,000 population
 - Justice in 90 days
 - Simple procedures in local language
 - Local government empowerment (Amendment of Art 243)

Contd...

Advocacy Issues

- Long Term
 - Political party regulation
 - Proportional representation (Mixed System)
 - Direct election of chief executive at state level
 - All India Judicial Service
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**“Never doubt that a group of thoughtful,
committed individuals can change the world.
Indeed it is the only thing that ever did”**

- Margaret Meade