

**LOK SATTA**  
*People Power*

**In Pursuit of Democratic Reforms**

SM Sehgal Foundation, 13<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2003, New Delhi

# Mission

*To promote peaceful, democratic transformation of Indian Governance process and enable India to achieve full potential through good governance*

# State and Liberty

- **Defend Freedom**
    - Laws to regulate conduct
    - Laws to protect liberty (child labor etc.)
    - Laws and systems to protect property rights
  - **Common Services**
  - **Facilitate enjoyment of freedom**
    - Public order and peace
    - Education
    - Health care
    - Elimination of drudgery
    - Conditions for economic growth
-

# DEMOCRACY

**Liberty**

**Self-Governance**

**Rule of Law**

**Institutional Self-Correcting  
Mechanisms**

**Empowerment**

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

**William Gladstone**

# Erosion of Liberty

- Poor quality school education
- Inaccessible primary health care
- Unaccountable police
- Unchecked crime
- Inefficient public services

# Key to Resolution

- Crisis is systemic
  - Most players are victims of a vicious cycle
  - Change of players not enough
  - Change of rules of the game needed
  - Values are not the issue
  - Institutions are the key
  - Resources are not a problem
  - The way they are deployed is the key
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## Public Expenditure as % of GDP

Country	Public Expenditure as % of GDP
United Kingdom	37.7
Germany	44.5
United States	32.7
India	26.0



## Priorities in Public Spending

Country	PE on Education as % of GDP	PE on Health as % of GDP
United Kingdom	4.5	5.9
Germany	4.6	8.0
United States	4.8	5.8
OECD	5.2	8.1
India	3.2	0.9

# 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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# 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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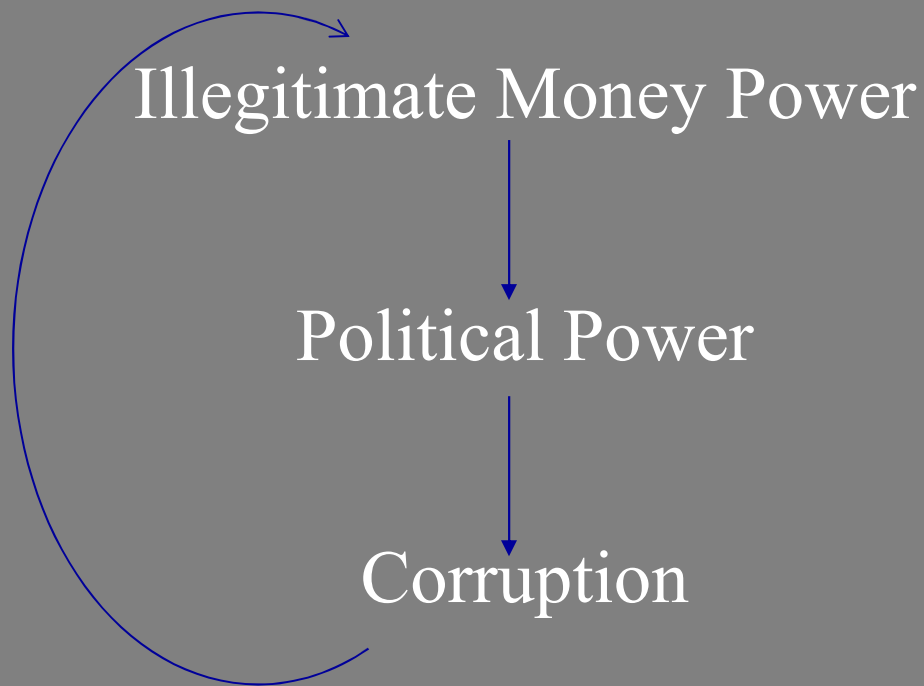
## In a Sane Democracy

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

# Failure of Political Process

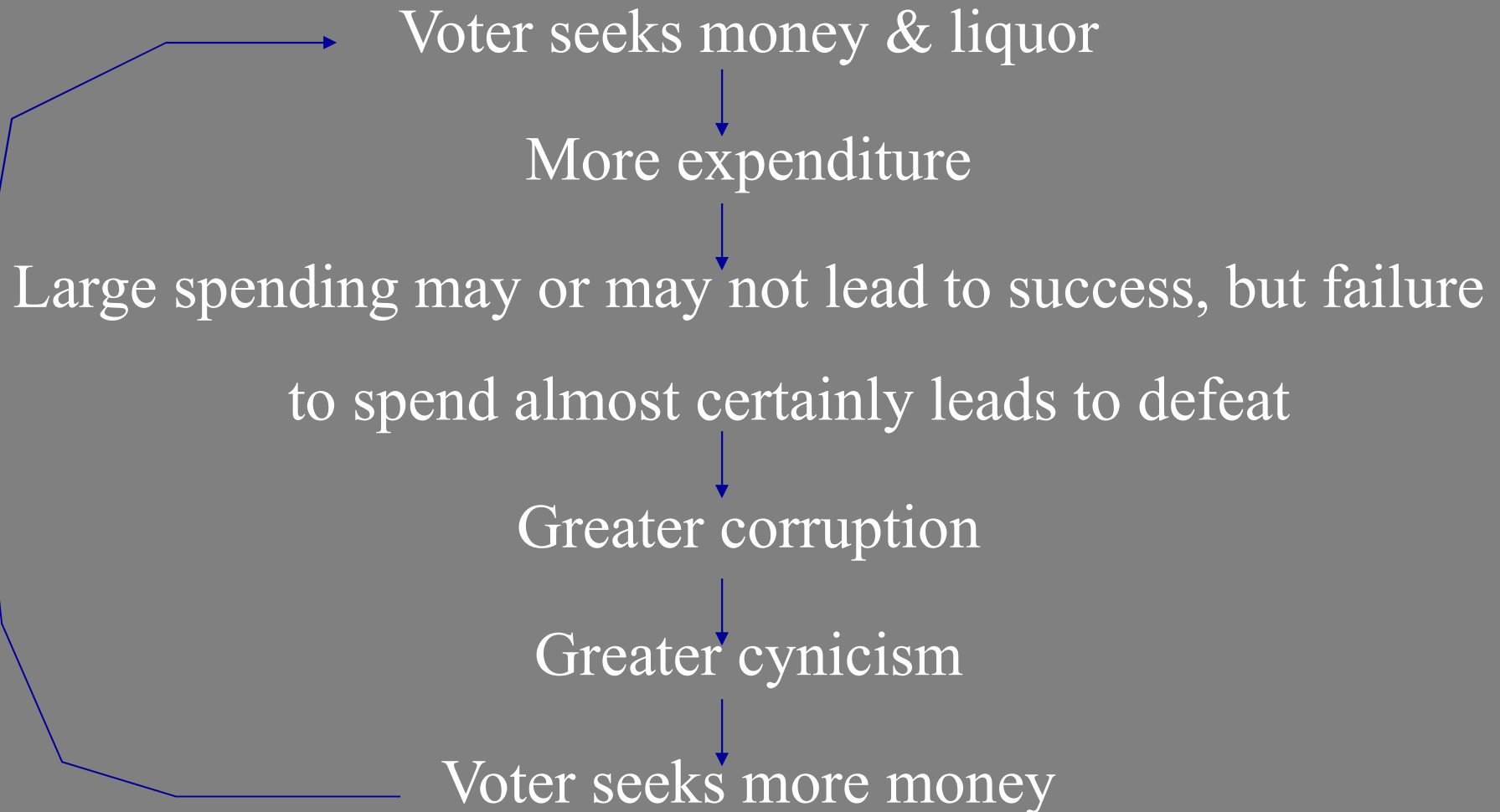
Interlocking vicious cycles

Inexhaustible demand for illegitimate funds



# Interlocking Vicious Cycles

Most expenditure is to buy vote



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# Interlocking Vicious Cycles

## 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

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# Interlocking Vicious Cycles

Vote de-linked 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

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# Interlocking Vicious Cycles

## Taxes de-linked from services

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

Fiscal deficits and crisis

Higher Taxes

↓  
Unacceptable because  
of corruption and poor  
services

De-subsidization

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

Wage Reduction

↓  
Centralization and Art  
311 preclude it

↓  
Deeper fiscal crisis

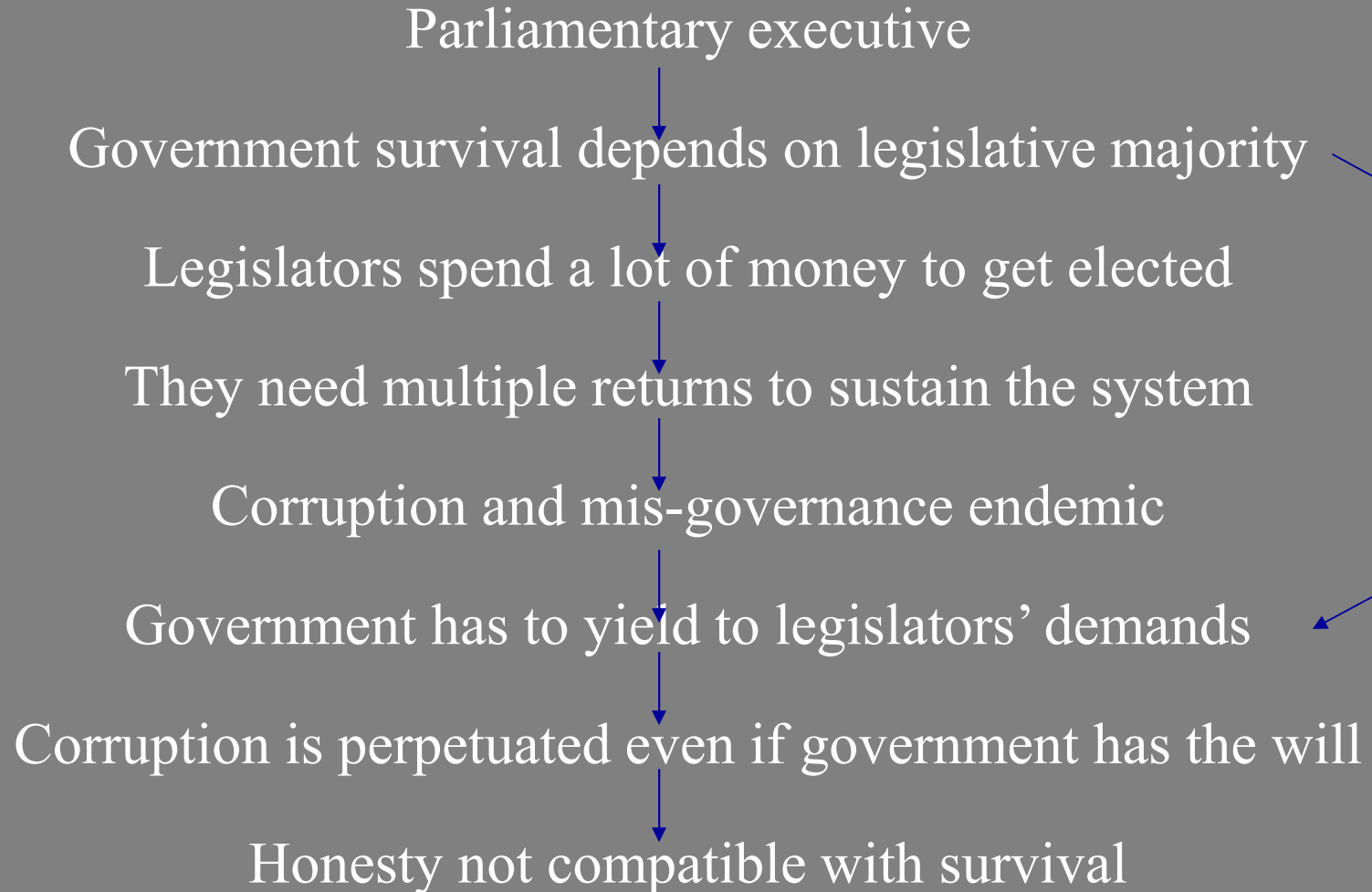
↓  
Poorer services and public goods

↓  
Perpetuation of poverty and backwardness

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# Interlocking Vicious Cycles

## 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.

# Irreducible Role of Government

- Public order
  - Rule of law
  - Justice
  - School education
  - Healthcare
  - Infrastructure
  - Natural resource development
  - Social security
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# What does the Citizen Expect?

- Justice
- Dignity
- Vertical mobility

# Way out

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

# Key Governance Reforms

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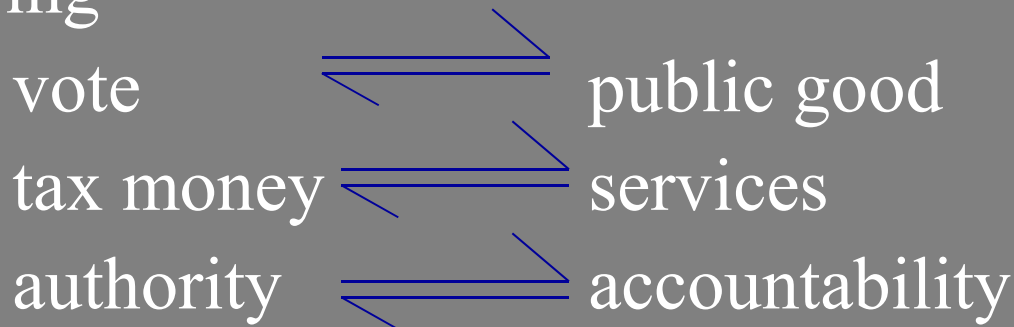


# Electoral Reforms

- 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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## Will Vote Buying Disappear?

- Not immediately
- People will continue to take money for voting
- Candidates will spend personal money for sometime
- Severe penalties will force disclosures
- Local government empowerment will reduce vote buying





- Value of vote will then be far greater than the money offered


# 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

# What can Citizens do?

- Resist misgovernance
- Check corruption
- Influence public discourse
- Channel resources better
- Enforce better services
- Bring pressure for reforms

# Approaches to Citizens' Action

- Collective, informed assertion
  - Wide dissemination of information
  - Effective mass communication
  - Strategic intervention
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## Citizens Initiatives – LOK SATTA's Experience

- People's watch
  - Election watch
  - Swarajya
  - Specific issue advocacy
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## Methods of Citizens' Action – People's Watch

- Collective informed assertion
- People's charter
- Lok Satta as platform
- Fight against corruption
- Fight for better delivery of public services

# Methods of Citizens' Action – Swarajya

- Advocacy and campaign for specific reform goals
- Choice of goals
  - Locally achievable
  - No cost / low cost
  - Universally acceptable
  - Strategic goals opening many doors

# Swarajya – Reform Goals

- Right to Information
  - Citizen's Charters
  - Empowerment of local governments
  - Empowerment of stake holders
  - Universally accessible school education
  - Speedy justice through rural courts
  - Toilet for every household
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# Methods of Citizens' Action – Election Watch

- Voter verification and registration
- Screening of candidates
- Know your candidates
- Common platforms
- State-level debates
- Training of volunteers
- Monitoring of polling process

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## Methods of Citizens' Action – Election Watch

- Does not aim to affect the outcome
  - Election time is ripe for awareness campaign
  - Focus on remediable flaws
  - Pressure on parties and candidates
  - Idea of accountability
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## Impact of LOK SATTA

- LOK SATTA was instrumental in creating a non-partisan platform for empowerment of local governments – Federation for Empowerment of Local Governments (FELG)
- LOK SATTA and FELG collected 1 crore (10 million) signatures for empowerment of local governments
- Govt. of Andhra Pradesh has responded by making a policy statement that it would devolve functions, funds and functionaries pertaining to subjects listed in XI and XII schedules of the Constitution of India

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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

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- 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
  - Post office as nodal agency for voter registration
  - Political funding law (recently enacted)
  - Tendered votes as a ground for automatic repolling

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## Advocacy Issues

- Short Term
  - 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)

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## 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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## Major Activities - AP

- o To enact a legislation for Gram Nyayalayas
- o Campaign for Local Government Empowerment – 1Crore signature campaign
- o Operationalize Right to Information through framing of appropriate rules

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## Major Activities - National

- o Election Watch in states going to polls later this year – Delhi, Rajasthan, MP and Chattisgarh
- o National Campaign for Electoral and Governance Reforms
- o National Communication Campaign

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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*