
Civil Society Forum's Manifesto for Lok Sabha Elections – May 2024

Secretariat:



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About Civil Society Forum

Civil Society Forum is a coalition of several civil society organisations and movements as well as individuals wishing to strengthen the electoral and democratic process in our city and state to make it more participatory and reflective of the real wishes of the people. The member organisations and individuals work in different sectors of urban and rural constituencies, engaging with diverse and marginalised communities in Karnataka and other states too. The Forum was actively involved in interacting with political parties, submitting Manifestoes during the Karnataka Assembly Elections in 2013, 2018 and 2023 and the Lok Sabha Elections in 2014 and 2019, and the BBMP elections in 2015 too.

Civil Society Forum's Participating Organisations

Sl. No.	Name of organisation	Represented by
1	Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA)	Sri. Lakshapathi, Sri. Suresh Kanta Borkar, Sri. I.S. Patil, Smt. Mangala
2	CARE	Sri. Manohar Ranganathan
3	Child Rights Trust	Sri. Vasudeva Sharma, Sri. Nagasimha Rao, Sri. Kalakappa, Smt. Jyoti A., Sri Satisha G.L.
4	CIVIC-Bangalore	Smt. Kathyayini Chamaraj, Smt. Rajarajeshwari, Smt. Kanchana
5	Eddelu Karnataka	Sri. Venkatesh
6	Fourth Wave Foundation	Sri. Ravi, G.
7	Global Concerns India	Smt. Brinda Adige, Smt. Zeena Mani
8	Indian Social Institute (ISI)	Fr. Francis Balaraj, Sr. Lilly, Sri. Manjunath, Fr. Selvin, Fr. Anthony Das
9	Maarga	Sri. R. Prabhakar
10	Mukti Alliance against Human Trafficking & Bonded Labour	Sri. A. Rajendran
11	National Centre for Labour (NCL)	Sri. Deendayal
12	Payana	Smt. Chandini
13	Safai Karamchari Kavalu Samithi (SKVS)	Sri K.B. Oblesh
14	Samvidanada Hadiyalli	Sri. Ashok Maridas
15	SICHREM	Sri. Mathew Thomas
16	TEDS Trust	Smt. Cynthia Stephen
17	Vimochana	Sri. Bhogaraj
18	Women's Voice	Smt. Leelavathi

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To all political parties:

We, civil society groups as well as a few individuals, from different sectors, met in Bangalore to discuss the civil, socio-economic and political situation of the nation in view of the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Our desire is to make a difference to the politics of the country by actively engaging in the perspective building of political manifestos in the coming elections of the Lok Sabha.

The recommendations that have been made are based on our deliberations that have critically viewed the functioning of the government as well as the development of the country in the last five years. We herewith request you to carefully read this document that lists our concerns and recommendations and to include our following demands in your manifestos for the coming Lok Sabha elections in May 2024.

We all share a common concern of the critical importance of the general elections of 2024 for the survival of Indian democracy. We have no doubt that the electoral verdict will affect the future of India's institutions, values and freedoms in a fundamental manner. Apart from the corrosion of institutions of democracy, the last five years have also seen a debasing of human values for electoral manipulation and the capture of power. Every means has been used to fan hatred and violence. The structure of the welfare state has been seriously undermined.

Agricultural workers, peasants, farmers, unorganized sector workers, minorities, tribals, dalits and women are being methodically erased from the public discourse, with the State setting a new benchmark of surrendering to corporate interests. We would like to see parties protecting constitutional values, people's rights and addressing aspirations of marginalized sections and preservation of environment with high priority. We as representatives of mass movements, campaigns and citizen collectives are coming together to encourage and support progressive forces in the 2024 elections.

Civil Society Forum Manifesto - Key Demands

Money for fundamental rights and basic needs to be reserved as first charge on resources:

- **Reset the direction by “People First” policy decisions:** All basic/fundamental rights and entitlements, such as food, water, child care, education, health, employment guarantee and social security should be universalised.
- These should be delivered by the state and not privatised. The budgets required for universalising these should be estimated realistically, earmarked and implemented through a law and not merely through schemes.
- **Specific measures to reduce gross economic inequalities:** Resources for the above should be found by imposing wealth, inheritance, and turnover taxes.
- Subsidies, tax exemptions and loan write-offs to the rich should be done away with.
- Ensure that no one is excluded because of Aadhaar. More robust data and privacy protection laws needed.
- Smart card to be introduced as comprehensive citizenship identity. Manual System to be continued ensuring no one is excluded.

Strengthening Governance:

- Strengthen Rule of Law and take strict action against official machinery and citizens taking law into their own hands.
- Repeal of laws/provisions that enable stifling of democratic dissent or provide draconian powers to police and armed forces, including UAPA, TADA, NSA, AFSPA and sedition clause of IPC and such other black laws.
- Unconditionally release people languishing in jail on false charges and ensure speedy justice to those being harassed.
- All autonomous/constitutional institutions (CAG, ECI, CIC, CBI, ED, CVC, etc.) need to be strengthened to maintain their independence as per Constitutional framework.
- Scrap all anti-people (farmers, workers, women, minorities, Dalits, Adivasis, OBC and marginalised communities, etc.) and anti-environment policies and Acts.
- Strengthen the Right to Information regime by ensuring timely and transparent appointments of information commissioners and restoring their status;
- Enact a law to provide an institutional framework for pre-legislative consultation.
- Operationalise the Whistle-Blowers’ Protection Act and enact the Grievance Redressal Bill; make social audit mandatory for all public schemes.
- Strengthening Federalism: Stop encroachment of constitutional rights of the States.
- Halt the privatization of PSUs, and essential services.
- Take effective steps to curb the enormous ‘black economy’, through over-invoicing of imports, round-tripping of funds through shell companies, illegal transfer of funds to tax-havens, etc.

Liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation:

- Reverse international agreements which are against the interest of our country and its sovereignty.
- Trade policy should be consistent with and promote the interests of farmers, workers and the marginalised, defend local industries against unfair trade.
- Parliament should discuss the proposed trade treaties and the trade agreements should become legal only when parliament ratifies them.

Decentralisation - Rural and urban local governance:

- All the subjects listed in the 11th and 12th Schedules of the Constitution, along with the 3Fs – funds, functions and functionaries - must be made mandatory for the Panchayath Raj Institutions/urban local self-governments (ULSGs) through a Constitution Amendment by creating a separate list for local bodies.
- Ensure that the legal powers of relevant local government, like gram sabhas, mohalla sabhas, tribal councils for monitoring, enforcement and redressal structures, are protected and their decisions are binding.

Employment:

- Stop monopolisation by a few big corporates and promote small and medium decentralised production and commerce to create jobs.
- Strengthen local economy to create jobs rather than building capital-intensive, high-end infrastructure such as expressways, airports, etc, which don't create many jobs.
- Reservation for micro/small/medium scale enterprises (MSMEs) of all products/services, especially handmade articles, that can be made through community-based producer collectives (such as textiles, footwear, household goods).
- Provide at least 150 days of employment guarantee as a fundamental right in both rural and urban areas to all adults.
- Paying them minimum wages at Rs. 25,000 per month would ensure that everyone's basic needs are met and that, in addition, land and water conservation and other social goals are met.
- Fill up all vacancies of sanctioned government posts for effective delivery of services, especially in ECCD, education and health sectors.
- Regularise employment of scheme workers, such as Anganwadi, ASHA, midday meal workers, etc.
- End contractualization of work that is a core and perennial activity that is carried on in the establishment.

Electoral reforms:

- Proportional representation (instead of the first-past-the-post system) should be brought so that every person's vote gets counted.
- A law regulating political parties to bring in inner-party democracy, with internal reservation for women, SC/STs, etc. and make them transparent about their funding

should be passed.

- Funding of political parties by the corporate sector should be banned.
- Persons with criminal records or cases pending against them should not be allowed to stand for elections.
- Anonymous electoral bonds should be scrapped.
- Tenth Schedule to be amended to prevent floor crossings and bringing down of elected governments invalidating the mandate given by the people.
- Stringent action to be taken by the Election Commission to curb the forces spreading communal hatred, or persons indulging in hate speech, calls for genocide and seeking votes in the name of caste, religion, etc., practising caste discrimination, oppression of weaker sections, and violence against women, transgender and sexual minorities, etc.
- Power to de-register parties/candidates indulging in the above and other violations to be given to the Election Commission.

Agriculture:

- A law, '*The Farmers' Right to Guaranteed Remunerative Minimum Support Prices for Agricultural Commodities Bill, 2018*', should be passed to assure remunerative prices (at least 50% on C2 Cost of Cultivation) for all farm produce, even for purchases by private buyers.
- The state should support and incentivise cooperative form of agriculture (from input and credit to farming, storage, processing, transportation and marketing of output) by way of farmers' collectives, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), especially of small and marginal farmers.
- No attempt to corporatize agriculture should be undertaken.

Land issues:

- Implement the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act, 2013 in letter and spirit.
- Protect dalits and tribals from forced evictions.
- Ensure implementation of land ceiling laws, transfer of surplus and other available land to landless poor and Dalits.
- Provide land rights, leasing rights and pattas to women.

Labour rights

- Minimum/living wages need to be fixed as per the VII Pay Commission calculation as per 15th Indian Labour Conference and Supreme Court rulings to cover all basic needs of a worker and his/her family which works out to about Rs. 18,000 /worker/month at 2016 prices (Rs. 25,000 at current prices). All wages should be linked to rise in cost-of-living index. A national minimum wage at these norms to be announced for all unskilled work for all unorganised sectors.
- Scrap four Labour Codes. The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act to be amended to make it universal with funding through contributions from employers,

employees and government in all areas of employment regardless of nature of employment or wage ceiling and or number of employees. All nine benefits to be provided as per ILO norms.

- Provide unconditional, non-contributory, social security pensions to elderly above 60 years at half the minimum wage. Eligibility for pension may be determined through fitness certificate even at earlier than 60 years.
- Contract workers should be regularised as per laws and paid equal wages for equal work.
- Working conditions, occupational safety of health and freedom of association should be regularised/standardised as per ILO norms for all workers.
- To improve working conditions of municipal sanitation workers, the contract system should be ended, and payment of minimum wages, observance of occupational safety standards and social security should be ensured.

Distress Labour Migration:

- The state should curb distress labour migration through effective implementation of employment guarantee and other sustainable livelihood schemes.
- The migrants' right to vote should be implemented from wherever they are currently located.
- Establish Migrant Workers Board in every state to make mandatory of the registration of migrant labourers and the contractors.
- Designate Grama Panchayats and municipal wards as registering bodies for inter-state and intra-state labour migrants.
- Strict enforcement of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen's Act has to be monitored. The provisions of the law should be made applicable to Intra-state migrants as well.
- Protective measures to promote safe and dignified labour migration should be ensured during their transition from source to destination states.
- In case of death of a migrant labourer, state should take the responsibility of transporting the body of the migrant labourer to his/her native village and adequate compensation should be given to the affected family.
- School-going children of the migrant labourers should be prevented from entering into labour force and educational facilities should be made available and accessible in both Government and Private educational institutions in source and destination states of their choice.
- Government-subsidised social rental housing and temporary free shelter homes for labour migrants should be made available in all cities.
- Provide free legal assistance to labour migrants who seek justice, compensation and redressal from exploitation and negligence by the employers and the contractors.

Bonded labour:

- Develop a National Action Plan to eradicate bonded labour and labour trafficking.
- Establish a national four-digit toll-free number for immediate response and intervention in cases of bonded labour and labour trafficking.

- Immediate assistance of Rs 30,000 and release of back wages as per minimum wages to be fully operational and institutionalised.
- Release certificate should be issued immediately after the rescue by the concerned authorities and rehabilitation measures initiated including allotment of land within prescribed time frame.
- A permanent inspection machinery (Task Force) should be set up at Gram Panchayat and Ward Level with labour inspectors, GP and municipal ward committee members and other officials to continuously track bonded labour.
- Employers known to use bonded labour must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.
- The loans being repaid by pledging children as bonded labour should also be extinguished and the children freed and rehabilitated.
- Free labour imposed on Dalits through custom should be treated as bonded labour and should be prosecuted under both Prohibition of Bonded Labour Act and PoA Act.

Anti-human trafficking:

- The scope of the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of the State Police should be enlarged to include crimes of trafficking of bonded labour, as much of the contemporary form of bonded labour is migratory in nature.
- Amend the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Amendment Act to include trafficking of bonded labour, for child labour, organ transplantation, child pornography, paedophilia, child sexual abuse, etc.
- Effective and efficient response mechanism of One Stop Crisis Centres across the Country

Homelessness

The National Programme for Shelter and other Services for Urban Homeless is now a component of National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM), viz. every one lakh urban population to have at least one permanent and well-equipped all-weather shelter.

Housing:

- A Right to Housing Act should be passed.
- Forced evictions of slum-dwellers without prior informed consent should be stopped.
- The entire land, where tenable, occupied by slum-dwellers to be used to build houses with their participation.
- Law on Property Rights to Slum-Dwellers to be passed.

Right to Food

- In order to avoid exclusion errors, the PDS benefits must be made universal with self-selection as in the MGNREGA.
- Each person should be entitled to at least 10 kgs foodgrains per month, including

locally-eaten grains such as millets, 800 grams of oil/person/month or 2.8 kgs per family; 1.5kg pulses per person/month or 5.25 kgs per month/family. In addition, eggs, milk, fruits and vegetables should be made available through the PDS.

- Ensure maternity entitlements that are equivalent to at least minimum wages at prevalent rates for nine months for all women.
- Mid-day meal scheme (MDMS) to be extended up to +12 or PUC end.
- Food grains to be locally procured for PDS and food prepared locally for MDMS and ICDS.
- The diet under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and mid-day meals should be enhanced through the use of millets, eggs and milk and yoghurt to be provided 6 days a week.
- Stop the systematic budget cuts and privatisation of food and nutrition programmes of the government like ICDS, Mid-Day Meal, etc.
- Provide all the identified Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) nationwide with doorstep delivery of a special free nutritional package of 10 kg food grain per person, 2 kg of dal, 2 kg cooking oil and 1 kg of ghee every month.
- Remove bans on slaughter of unproductive cows on religious and other grounds.
- Free kitchens for vulnerable sections of the population need to be provided.

Right to water

- Policy intervention needed to prevent privatisation and commodification of water. All water including ground water should be treated as common property.
- A lifeline supply of water, about 8,000 ltrs per family, should be provided free of cost universally. Higher amounts of consumption should be charged graded fees.
- Rejuvenate all kinds of water resources [lakes, ponds, man-made tanks, etc.] in both rural and urban areas through conservation, management, reuse and rainwater harvesting to answer the shortage of water.
- The policy should encompass municipal projects of the same nature using roads as collection paths and parks as storage and recharging units.

Right to education

- NEP needs to be scrapped.
- Spend 6% of GDP for education as recommended by the Kothari Commission.
- State should ensure a common schooling system.
- Amend the RTE Act to make education free and compulsory from pre-school for 3 to 6 year-olds to higher secondary education for 15 to 18 year-olds (Class 12) as legal entitlements.
- Proper 'preventive protocols' should be developed to prevent drop-outs and ensure retention of all children. Designated officials not following protocol should be held accountable for every out-of-school child by imposing penalties.
- Ensure that every school, including government schools, is RTE compliant by 2025. Norms under RTE should ensure one teacher per class, one classroom per teacher, drinking water, a specific number of toilets for boys and girls based on their

numbers, playground, compound, cleaner and watchman.

- Ensure age-appropriate learning outcomes for children in all schools.
- Secondary education from the age of 15 to 18 years should be compulsory in either of two streams, academic or vocational, or a combination of both, based upon the aptitude and best interest of the child.

Right to Health

- Government expenditure on health care to be raised to a minimum of 3% of GDP.
- State to be the primary provider ensuring Universal Health Care through free, preventive, protective, curative, rehabilitative care to ALL citizens, rather than the government paying the private sector to provide the service. Private health system to be regulated with capping of prices, standard treatment protocols, etc.
- The former 3-year Licentiate Medical Practitioner (LMP) course should be revived so that these doctors can provide services at the Primary Health Centres.
- Recognise all forms of violence against women as a public health issue and equip public health system to address it as such.

Women's Empowerment

- 33% Reservation Bill for women in Assemblies and Parliament to be implemented immediately without waiting for fresh census and delimitation of constituencies.
- All government created and allotted housing and house-sites should be done in the name of the woman head of household.
- 50% representation of women in all government structures like judiciary and police at all levels.
- Implement POSH Act provisions in all institutions where women work.
- Unpaid work of women to be converted to paid work by setting up child care and elderly care centres.

Children's issues

- Age certification by designated authorities (SDMs or CDPOs) **before** conducting any marriage should be made compulsory to prevent child marriages.
- ECCD should be universalised as per the SC order in the Right to Food case, within the time-frame agreed to by States through affidavits to the SC.
- Convert anganwadis into full day-care centres (crèches) open for at least 10 hours, for children 0-6 to help all working women and their children.
- Drinking water, child-friendly toilets, separate room for sleeping, play equipment and playgrounds to be provided at all anganwadis/creches.
- Land to be acquired, purchased or rented at prevailing market rates for fulfilling availability and infrastructure norms of anganwadis.
- Inclusion of Anganwadi Centres for 3 to 6 year-olds in the primary school (as per NEP 2020) must be carefully thought through.
- Child labour: When compulsory school age is raised to 18 years, the minimum age for general employment in any sector, including in agriculture, etc., should also be

raised to 18 years.

Dalits:

- The SC/ST Sub-Plan should be given statutory status by passing Central legislation, as in Andhra Pradesh & Karnataka, ensuring that the amounts allocated under this Act do not lapse or are misused.
- SC/STs without land, house, water, anganwadi, health, education and jobs need to be identified and schemes should reach those who are currently deprived of these.
- Set up a national mission to end manual scavenging and sewer workers death and full implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013. Ensure requisite changes in technology and law to ensure dignity and safety of sanitation workers.

Rights and welfare of forest-based tribals

- Reversing tribal land alienation through a range of legislative measures including Gram Sabha's participation in the identification, investigation and restoration of lands to tribal people.
- Implement the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 in letter and spirit.
- Land of forest-based tribals to be prohibited from acquisition for industry, infrastructure, mining, tourism etc.,

Rights of persons with disability (PWD) & Caregivers

- Adequate budgetary allocations for the proper implementation of the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act. and the Mental Health Care Act need to be supported by:
 - 5 % of the budget being earmarked for the sector and not allowed to lapse;
 - Country-wide census of PWD to be held at the earliest as per the Act;
 - 3% of all electoral constituencies should be reserved for the PWD.
- All policies/schemes of the government and public institutions must be required to carry out disability audits and ensure accessibility of all public spaces and transport for PWDs.
- Implementation of reservations, childcare for disabled persons and effective ICDS integration of all disabled children.
- PWDs should have first claim on all land distribution programmes.
- Employment guarantee must provide for inclusion of PWDs.
- As per the RPWD Act 2016 caregiver allowances should be given and caregivers should be covered under social security schemes. Mental health support and counselling for caregivers to be provided.

Sexual minorities:

- Action to be taken to control the violence/harassment meted out by the police to street-based sexual minorities.
- Provide grant-in-aid as part of self-employment, sanction houses and lands to such

women under its housing schemes. Women affected by HIV should have ART facilities in all district hospitals.

- The requirement of giving father's name must be changed to mother's name.

Sanitation:

- Rehabilitation of manual scavengers has to be taken up in mission mode with a fixed time-frame and skilling and decent alternative jobs provided to them.
- Strict implementation of the SC's 14 directions issued in October 2023, including increase in the compensation to ₹30 lakh in case of sewer deaths, 20 lakhs in case of permanent disablement or injury and 10 lakhs in case of disability.
- The entire process of manual scavenging should be replaced by automation.
- Efficient and eco-friendly collection of solid waste, including segregation at source, segregated collection in mechanised, closed vehicles to prevent manual handling, containerized storage, local processing of biodegradable waste, recycling of dry wastes and scientific disposal of rejects as spelt out in the Ministry of Forest & Environment Rules 2016 need to be implemented as a top priority.

Protection of environment and sustainability:

- Mandatory **environmental and social impact assessments** of projects, programmes, schemes and sectors, through independent agencies, with full participation of affected communities. Cost benefit analysis of projects to include environmental cost.
- **Revisions of the National and State Action Plans on Climate Change, and Disaster plans**, to fully support vulnerable sections cope with and adapt to the climate crisis and other disasters.
- **Budgeting for a country-wide programme of localised land/soil and water regeneration** oriented at creating sustainable natural resource assets for local community economies.
- Food production through organic, biologically diverse methods; and decentralized energy production including rooftop and on-farm methods.
- Legally empower relevant local assemblies like gram sabhas, mohalla sabhas, tribal councils to be part of decision-making, monitoring, enforcement and redressal structures to improve environmental governance.
- Following due process and facilitation of genuine public consultations in the case of all large investments, especially industries and infrastructure projects.
- Legislation to incentivise the manufacture and use of public transport and non-motorised private vehicles and disincentivise the manufacture and use of private cars.
- Imposing a congestion tax, higher taxes for second and third vehicles, graded parking fees, etc. for disincentivising private vehicles
- An accessible, affordable, frequent, reliable, and prioritized bus transport system is the need of the hour in cities and rural areas.
- Cheaper, existing surface rail options for intra-city transport rather than capital-

intensive metro options.

- Effective feeder systems and shared local transport systems to be introduced for last mile connectivity.

Human Rights Institutions & Human rights defenders

- Amend the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, guaranteeing complete independence and autonomy to the NHRC empowering the NHRC & all other commissions to pass binding orders and with powers to implement its orders.
- Enact a strong law, in compliance with international standards, for the protection of human rights defenders.
- Demonstrate through policies and action steps taken to end the intimidation, harassment and judicial persecution faced by human rights defenders.
- Refrain from acts leading to the closure of civil society organisations or the suspension of their peaceful activities.
- Ensure that security forces, including the police, abide by the United Nations basic principles on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials.

Judicial Reforms

- Implementation of the formal Gram Nyayalaya Act 2008 across the nation.
- The selection process for the appointment of judges at all levels by the judicial appointment mechanisms to be specified and respected by the executive.

Conclusion:

Parties need to make the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections free and fair by:

- Commitment towards strengthening democracy by engaging in fair electoral practices.
- Not engaging in any kind of influencing of voters by way of kind, cash, favours or threats to citizens.
- Ensuring that all promises made to the citizens during the course of the elections and as mentioned in the manifesto are legal and constitutionally valid.
- In the context of the misuse of artificial intelligence & deep fakes to mislead the public and spread misinformation, the access and use of such technologies to be strongly regulated by the government.
- All political parties and candidates to strictly avoid hate speech, calls for genocide & asking for votes in the name of caste, religion, etc.
- Providing adequate representation of women and people from marginalized sections voluntarily in the list of contesting candidates.
- Not exceeding the ceiling on expenditure incurred during election campaigning.
- Prohibiting candidates with criminal charges from contesting the elections
- Supporting a provision for the Election Commission to forward the assets and liabilities information declared by the candidates to IT department and Enforcement Directorate for action against illegal possession of assets.

- Ensuring that tickets are given only to persons with a clean record of service, who are non-communal;
- Not indulging in horse-trading post elections.
- Above all, by abiding by Constitutional values and rule of law.
