



INDIA INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL ACTION -
CENTRE IN MOVEMENT (CACIM)

ANNUAL REPORT

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INDIA INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL ACTION - CENTRE IN MOVEMENT (CACIM)

CACIM (the India Institute for Critical Action - Centre in Movement) was founded in 2005 to promote a culture of critical reflexivity, thought and action in public life and activity. Our programmes are part of the larger effort to create spaces where dialogue can happen among people on the margins, academia and social groups. Through critical action, our attempts are to contribute broadly and more effectively for transformational social power.

CACIM grew out of an experimental informal association named Critical Action (CA) that existed during 2001-05 between scholars and organisers in different parts of the world; and of several years prior to that, of research into and direct involvement in the history and dynamics of social and political movement, by several CA members. Having started with a primary focus on the project of democratisation and active citizenship, we gradually expanded into the areas of environment, urbanisation, marginalities, active citizenship, and financial accountability.

Mission

CACIM strives to strengthen the capacities and effectiveness of social organisations and their members and of their supporters, through helping them develop a deeper than usual analysis of broader political, social, and economic structures and dynamics that underlie various problems. Our mission is to stimulate multiple learning centres across disciplines and cultures, and support and encourage all those involved in different ways with social organisations – organisers, researchers, teachers, professionals, artists, composers, and thinkers, both mature and young, and to promote criticality in socio-political processes and actions. A related goal is to help social organisations to build mutually supportive alliances instead of operating alone on single issues.

Focus of our work:

CACIM has envisioned and planned its key areas of engagements across:

1. Strategies and Cultures of Movement: movement dynamics, social transformation processes and the role of alliances and networks
2. Rights, Resources and Accountability: community rights over natural resources, access to rights, accountability of state and non-state actors
3. Marginalities, Democracy and Power

Key Processes

CACIM attempts to be critically reflective in all its work and processes, as well as all times, promote critical thought, engagement, and action, also learning from other initiatives and processes. Our core activities are:

- Research and documentation resulting in publications in different languages
- Building awareness and strengthening capacities through organising workshops, seminars, and other meetings
- Networking and outreach collaborations with the community groups and organisations across the country
- Educational initiatives and courses for young people inside and outside the colleges and universities
- Disseminate and promote all publications through the use of list serves, websites, and other new media



Introduction

In 2024, CACIM faced the revocation of its Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) license, which posed significant challenges to securing the necessary resources for its operations. Despite this considerable obstacle, the organisation has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, successfully continuing to advance its core objectives. Through strategic adjustments and unwavering commitment, CACIM has maintained its focus on promoting transparency and accountability within financial institutions, while continuing to support marginalized and vulnerable communities. This period has underscored the organisation's capacity to navigate complex circumstances and sustain meaningful impact in its areas of work.



COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND ACTION TOWARDS ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Work with Marginalised Sewer Workers in Delhi-NCR

Over the past year, the organisation undertook a series of interconnected interventions aimed at empowering sewer workers across Delhi-NCR, while confronting deeply entrenched systemic issues that continue to marginalise them. Through a sustained programme of legal education, leadership development, outreach, documentation, and public engagement, the team sought not only to address immediate violations of labour rights but also to lay the foundation for long-term structural transformation.

Central to this work were ten intensive workshops organised specifically for sewer workers—each attended by approximately 25 participants—focusing on legal rights, occupational health and safety, and the broader legal entitlements often inaccessible to this precarious workforce. These were complemented by two leadership workshops designed to equip workers with the skills and confidence needed to become local organisers and advocates, capable of engaging directly with municipal authorities and representing their collective demands. These sessions formed part of a larger strategy to foster collective action and self-advocacy among workers who have historically been rendered invisible by both state mechanisms and dominant social hierarchies.

In order to amplify the voices of sewer workers within public discourse, the organisation facilitated a large-scale public meeting and seminar followed by a public hearing, which provided a platform for workers to present their grievances to media, civil society actors, and policymakers. This forum enabled an honest reckoning with the exploitation and invisibilisation of sanitation labour, giving workers the rare opportunity to speak on their own terms. Additionally, a cultural programme was organised to build solidarity and extend the reach of advocacy beyond legal frameworks. Attracting over 50,000 attendees, this event brought together sewer workers and allies from various sectors, using music, theatre, and public dialogue to foreground the principles of Ambedkar, Dalit reformers, and the importance of dignity in labour. The cultural programme served as a powerful act of reclamation—of identity, visibility, and collective memory.

The organisation's efforts were grounded in a comprehensive baseline survey conducted across the East and South Delhi municipal zones, identifying numerous contract-based sewer workers employed by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) for cleaning sewers and underground drains. While the survey succeeded in mapping key trends and workforce needs, its impact in terms of formal recognition and rights has been limited. Only a small number of workers have since been made permanent, and despite repeated assurances from DJB supervisors, the formal issuance of identification cards for contract workers remains stalled due to bureaucratic delays.

Regular outreach meetings, consultations, and workshops were conducted across multiple DJB store locations, engaging sewer workers in discussions about legal entitlements, occupational hazards, and pathways to collective redress. These sessions were instrumental in raising awareness and preparing workers for direct engagement with government authorities. However, challenges included disruptions caused by a change in government, shifting policies and personnel, and notices from DJB restricting meetings considered irrelevant to specific store operations. Despite these obstacles, the outreach successfully sensitised many workers to their rights and available mechanisms to address issues such as wage disparities, delayed payments, unjust terminations, unsafe working conditions, and increased working hours mandated by recent government orders.

The programme faced persistent structural challenges, including frequent changes in contractors that disrupted employment continuity and protections, absence of new tenders or moves toward regularisation, widespread wage disparities across DJB stores for similar work, inadequate social security coverage for the majority of workers, and political pressures that delayed policy reforms and curtailed workers' avenues for grievance expression. These systemic barriers continue to hinder the achievement of permanent solutions, though the team remains committed to advocating for reforms that uphold sewer workers' rights and welfare.

To strengthen advocacy efforts, public consultations were organised involving legal experts, technical professionals, and civil society representatives, which enabled critical examination of existing regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms. These forums resulted in memorandums of demands submitted to relevant government authorities. When possible, direct engagement between sewer workers and state officials was facilitated, creating constructive spaces for workers to voice concerns and seek redressal.

Between May 2024 and May 2025, the organisation conducted fact-finding investigations into more than ten sanitation worker deaths in the Delhi-NCR region, many linked to hazardous working conditions resembling manual scavenging despite official claims of eradication. These investigations encountered significant obstacles, including restricted access to incident sites and victim families, lack of cooperation from authorities, and contradictory accounts from police, municipal officials, hospital staff, and contractors. Despite these challenges, detailed reports were published that attracted considerable attention from media and human rights organisations, serving as vital tools to challenge official narratives and advocate for policy change. While some families obtained compensation through mediation, most still face legal and bureaucratic hurdles, and no prosecutions have been initiated to date, reflecting ongoing impunity.

In addition to these activities, the organisation provided legal assistance to workers facing unjust dismissal, delayed wages, and unsafe working conditions through legal workshops and case-based support. These efforts empowered workers with knowledge of their rights under Indian labour laws and enabled them to navigate legal challenges effectively. The cumulative work of the team has contributed to a significant shift in workers' self-perception and collective power, fostering confidence to demand better conditions, develop leadership capacities, and engage officials constructively. While progress has been made, challenges remain in reaching workers who continue to fear retaliation and are reluctant to voice their concerns.

Work with Natural Resource-based Communities

Forest Dwelling Communities in Madhya Pradesh: Between March and June 2024, the organisation implemented a series of initiatives focused on empowering tribal communities in Mandla district, Madhya Pradesh, around constitutional rights, land acquisition issues, forest rights, and natural resource conservation. These activities aimed to strengthen local governance, ensure effective implementation of forest-related legislation, and promote sustainable resource management. However, the efforts encountered constraints related to limited support and resources, impacting the scale and pace of engagement.

On March 5, 2024, a Mahapanchayat was convened in village Odhari, Mohgaon block, bringing together local tribal communities, elected representatives including the Member of Parliament, Member of Legislative Assembly, and District Panchayat members. The discussion centered on constitutional safeguards under the Fifth Schedule and provisions related to land acquisition. Emphasis was placed on the necessity of Gram Sabha consent in accordance with Section 16 of the Madhya Pradesh Land Acquisition Rules and Clauses 18(1) and (2) of the PESA Rules. The assembly resolved to ensure transparency in Gram Sabha meetings and formal communication of resolutions to government authorities. This event underscored the community's commitment to participatory governance but highlighted the ongoing challenge of translating these resolutions into enforceable government action.

During the Lok Sabha elections in April 2024, a voter awareness campaign was conducted across villages in the project area. Due to the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, formal large-scale programming was limited; however, village-level dialogues persisted, fostering continued community engagement on electoral rights. The campaign helped maintain political awareness despite restrictions but was constrained by regulatory limitations.

In May 2024, the organisation initiated a campaign to facilitate individual and community forest rights claims under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) across several villages. Community claims were successfully drafted and ratified in Gram Sabha resolutions in villages such as Suarjhar and Banjhdih, with applications submitted to Mandla's land records office for retrieval of historical documentation supporting these claims. Additionally, individual claims were filed in Gorakhpur, with ongoing discussions in other villages regarding community claims. This process fostered legal empowerment but faced delays due to limited administrative cooperation and insufficient documentation.

In June 2024, a resource register for village Dongar was completed, providing a crucial baseline for natural resource management. Concurrently, consultations and communication on forest rights claims continued in surrounding villages. These activities have strengthened local knowledge and participatory resource governance, though progress was slowed by resource constraints affecting the scale of engagement and documentation efforts.

The overall objectives aimed to empower Gram Sabhas to protect water and forest resources under the Forest Rights Act 2006 and Madhya Pradesh Biodiversity Rules 2004, promote dialogue with government agencies for improved FRA implementation, monitor social security scheme outreach, and encourage organic farming practices. While some progress has been made in Gram Sabha mobilisation and claim preparation, limited human and financial resources have restricted widespread outreach and follow-up activities.

Several constraints impeded optimal progress. Limited financial and human resources restricted the scale of activities, affecting the frequency of community meetings, resource mapping, and legal support. Slow administrative processes in land record retrieval and claim approvals delayed outcomes and discouraged some community members. While some local officials were responsive, inconsistent government support hindered effective implementation of policies. Furthermore, the Model Code of Conduct during elections limited large-scale mobilisation activities, reducing campaign impact.

Despite these challenges, the organisation has laid critical groundwork for strengthening community rights and natural resource governance in Mandla.

Coastal Communities in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala: Between April and June 2025, CACIM undertook significant public awareness campaigns addressing the environmental consequences of the Kerala Coastal Highway project, focusing primarily on the coastal belt villages of Kerala. This outreach engaged a diverse audience, including local women's collectives, legislative assembly members, social and cultural leaders, and the wider public. Central to these efforts was a comprehensive study on the impacts of climate disasters and infrastructure developments on coastal women's communities, which informed ongoing dialogue and advocacy. The campaign also aimed to strengthen women's collectives, particularly through the Theeradesa Vanita Vedi, by empowering coastal women's groups and creating platforms that encouraged active participation and the articulation of women's voices on issues affecting their communities. As a result of these initiatives, government officials began inviting the Theeradesa Women's Collective to participate in discussions related to the Coastal Highway and associated land issues, reflecting increased recognition of their role in shaping policy. Additionally, the opposition party in the Kerala government engaged with the collective, seeking their input to prepare questions for legislative assembly sessions, thereby amplifying their influence on critical debates. Despite these achievements, resource constraints led to the early conclusion of the project supported by this grant in July 2024.

Knowledge and Resource Sharing towards Empowerment of Youth, Students, Communities and Civil Society Organisations

Due to constraints on resources, CACIM's activities under this initiative were limited to the end of June. Within this period, CACIM undertook a range of efforts aimed at developing briefing materials and content designed to enhance the understanding and engagement of students, activists, civil society organisations, communities, and researchers on complex issues related to the global and national financial architecture, particularly in relation to questions of economy and development. Based on desk research, the team produced a variety of outputs including reports, primers, briefing notes, and articles. A series of webinars were also organised to facilitate dialogue and knowledge-sharing. In addition, technical inputs were provided in solidarity with community struggles, contributing knowledge support to ongoing grassroots efforts.

Progress was made in identifying the absence of safeguard mechanisms within Indian banks, an issue raised in the context of man-made environmental disasters such as the Sikkim floods and the destruction of the Teesta dam. Recognition of the need for strong safeguards has been increasing among groups working on developmental issues. The project was moving toward its second phase, which focuses on amplifying these concerns.

In the initial phase, introducing communities and civil society organizations to the concept of demanding social and environmental safeguards within the financial sector was challenging. This was addressed through short publications and strategic programs that discussed the importance of these safeguards and promoted their inclusion on the agenda. Meetings, consultations, and direct engagements with representatives of key organizations were held to build support.

Communities involved regarded this approach as a new tool for demanding accountability and an opportunity to elevate discourse. Responses from financial institutions varied; some did not respond, while others questioned the focus on financial institutions. Surveillance of people's movements and dissent posed challenges. Despite this, communication with communities continued, with regular updates provided on follow-up activities.

Given the continued lack of transparency and slow responses from banks, plans were made to engage directly with bank management through a roundtable discussion to highlight the need for improved transparency, accountability, and the adoption of robust social and environmental safeguards. Prior communications were held with bank officers' associations and employees through their unions to identify potential internal allies.

A working group on gender was constituted to contribute to the formulation of Environmental and Social Safeguards within Indian commercial banks. The focus during this project period included addressing the impact of just energy transition on women and integrating women's concerns into the civil society draft for safeguard policies in national financial institutions, with the aim of fostering greater understanding and promoting equality.

Following the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) release of the draft disclosure framework on climate-related financial risks, a submission was made urging the RBI to expand the framework to include social and environmental safeguards, calling for comprehensive accountability of financial institutions for the environmental, climate, and social impacts of their investments.

A civil society initiative responded to the RBI's Draft Prudential Framework for Income Recognition, Asset Classification, and Provisioning under Implementation Directions 2024. The guidelines were found insufficient in mandating strong environmental, social, and climate safeguards at the institutional level. Proposals were made to establish oversight and grievance redressal mechanisms within financial institutions to ensure accountability.

To support the discussion on social and environmental safeguards, a flipbook on investments in the Ladakh region was published, noting that significant projects such as dams and solar parks were proceeding without sufficient consideration of social, environmental, and ecological factors. This work was linked to efforts by several civil society organizations in the region.

In June 2024, a book launch was organised for Pankaj Sekhsaria's *The Great Nicobar Betrayal* in Delhi, accompanied by discussions on the corporate and state capture of natural resources in India, and the implications for social and environmental safeguards.

In terms of just transition and community interventions, local communities in Singrauli submitted a memorandum on June 10, 2024, with 34 demands addressing displacement and rehabilitation of labourers working in two coal mines. Engagement with these communities included support in advocating for safeguards from investors.

Articles in Media, April- June 2024:

- [By financing environmentally damaging projects, can Indian funders be held liable?](#), April 2024
- [Submission to RBI on Draft Disclosure Framework on Climate-Related Financial Risks](#), 2024
- [Response to the Reserve Bank of India's Draft Prudential Framework for Project Finance](#), June 2024
- [Ladakh: Are we investing in our doom](#), Flipbook, April 2024
- [Climate accountability: Disclose more, put checks before financing mega projects](#), May 2024
- [Why RBI's financial governance should address social and environmental concerns](#), July 2024
- Media coverage: [RBI's Project Financing Framework Needs to Examine Causes for Overruns, Factor in Climate Risk: CSOs](#), June 2024
- Media coverage: [RBI urged to consider climate in big projects](#), June 2024



CACIM (the India Institute for Critical Action – Centre in Movement) is an initiative towards cultivating and nurturing a culture of critical reflexivity and action in individual and public work.

In principle we expect to work in many fields, but our focus at the moment is on activism, research, and publication in relation to social and political movement. We primarily work by building and maintaining real and virtual spaces for fundamental research and critical reflection, exploration, action, and creation in the field of movement : Books, seminars, workshops, websites, listserves, and newsbulletins and action alerts. Initiated in India in 2005, CACIM is transnational, intercultural, and interdisciplinary in vision and culture.



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