

**National Consultation on Impacts of Mining on Women in India**  
**12<sup>th</sup> –13<sup>th</sup> February, 2010, Orissa**

The National Consultation on Impacts of Mining on Women in India was organised on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> February 2010, at Angul, Orissa. **Dhaatri Resource Centre, Samata, and mines, minerals & PEOPLE (mm&P)** had undertaken a national level study on the problems and impacts of women affected by different mining activities in the country, with case studies from five states in India – Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Rajasthan. The National Consultation was organised to share the findings of the study with the various campaigns and people's struggles working on mining issues in India, particularly, the groups that were involved in the field case studies.

The Consultation, hosted by **Nari Surkhya Samithi**, and supported by **HIVOS**, was attended by over 50 women and grassroots activists from different states, both from mine workers' groups as well as adivasi/people's struggles fighting against displacement due to mining projects. A field visit was organised to the affected villages and displaced/resettled colonies around the Mahanadi Coal Fields, which is one of the largest and earliest public sector companies in India, funded by the World Bank.

Adivasi (indigenous) women from the proposed bauxite mining and refinery areas of Andhra Pradesh, alumina plant area in Niyamgiri of Orissa, RPG power project and coal mining projects in Dumka and Hazaribagh districts of Jharkhand, MCL Coal mining area of Orissa, dolomite and limestone mining affected women from Sundargarh in Orissa narrated their problems, particularly the corporate and police excesses and the forcible land acquisition that is taking place in their lands. Women mine workers of stone quarries and iron-ore mines from Maharashtra and Karnataka presented their problems of low wages, uncertain work, mine accidents, the health problems and living conditions. Particularly, every one spoke about the crisis of water as mining companies pollute the water bodies and communities and workers are forced to consume contaminated water or live without water facility as ground water is badly depleted due to mining.

The field visit to the villages around the Mahanadi coalfields was evidence of the problems faced due to mining and especially the deplorable state of resettlement and rehabilitation. Here, communities complained of the improper rehabilitation processes, lack of compensation or employment in the mines and the destruction to their agriculture and fishing resources. The NALCO fly-ash pond and the high levels of air and water pollution that were clearly visible, was symbolic of the irresponsible nature of mining activities that are destroying not just the immediate surroundings, but the entire region where extraction and processing projects are located. The participating women who came from different states, were shocked and terrified to see the status of mining affected villages and expressed their anger that the government wanted to convert their respective areas to similar form of destruction.

We present here, a very brief summary of the findings of our study shared at the Consultation and the recommendations given by us, to the Ministry of Mines with regard to the problems of women and children affected by mining in India.

- Women have been the worst affected when displaced by mining projects, especially adivasi and dalit women. No mining project in India has provided for proper rehabilitation even where large public sector companies like NALCO, MCL are concerned. Women were not direct beneficiaries of rehabilitation, are eligible for employment or formal job opportunities. Particularly women headed households have become destitute and impoverished. The case of Mahanadi Coal Fields where we found many destitute women, badly implemented resettlement

programmes, destroyed agriculture lands, homestead kitchen gardens, forest resources, fishing and livestock breeding, which were the main livelihood and food security sources for women.

- Water is one main problem expressed by women in all the mine sites. Mining has contaminated water bodies by dumping mine tailings, depleted ground water affecting agriculture and domestic water needs. Women and children suffer from serious health problems because of polluted water and air like skin diseases, asthma, respiratory ailments, silicosis, tuberculosis, filariasis, hydrocele, cancer, reproductive health problems, physical and mental disabilities. Malaria has increased in every place where there is mining due to stagnant mine pits. Mental illness and stress among women increased due to loss of livelihood, increase in sexual abuse and domestic violence where traditional villages became mining slums and displaced camps.
- Women mine workers are mainly found in unorganised sector and suffer from uncertain work, very low wages, unsafe working conditions, exploitation by mine owners and contractors. Indebtedness, alcoholism, tuberculosis, mine accidents among workers has increased child labour in mines and other activities from families of mine workers where children are not attending school but working in hazardous activities.
- India is going ahead with huge mining and power projects inspite of serious human rights violations in existing projects and is forcing communities to give up their lands against strong protests.

**Our important demands are:**

- India should not go ahead with new mining projects unless existing projects have been cleaned up, especially the public sector companies. Rehabilitation should be completed with immediate effect in every mining project with consultation of women and giving direct benefits to women. The main demand is that women must given Joint Pattas for house-sites and land given as compensation and cash compensation should be made through joint accounts of both husband and wife.
- Women/daughters from every family displaced/affected should be given direct employment in the mining company
- India should respect the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Communities for right to free prior and informed consent with regard to mining projects. It should adhere to its national laws like the Fifth Schedule and PESA Acts before sanctioning mining projects
- Every displaced colony should have a school for the children of affected families with same quality as that of the schools run by mining companies in their townships. Medical facilities and free medical treatment should be provided for all the communities affected by the project, not just the employees.
- All departments, not just the Forest Department, including Water, Education, Women and Child Welfare, Health, Roads and Transport should be consulted and their clearances should be obtained before giving mining lease.
- No quarry or mining lease should be given without the mine owner providing proper housing, drinking water, crèche, primary school, ration card, workers' identity cards, work safety equipment for women, toilets for women, and accident benefits and insurance for women mine workers
- If child labour is found in any mine site, the mining licence should be immediately cancelled.
- The Mining Plan should include social costs and rehabilitation including benefits and rights to women and children from prospecting to post mine closure
- The proposed amendments to the MMDR Act which is being proposed in the current parliamentary session, should incorporate all the above recommendations as a legal mandate with stronger regulatory and monitoring mechanisms clearly specified in the Act.