



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research
Vol. 07, Issue, 12, pp.18146-18150, December, 2017



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

IMPACTS OF DISPLACEMENT: UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S IMPOVERISHMENT AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

***Dr. Ranjita Behera**

WSRC, Berhampur University, Odisha, India

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 18th September, 2017
Received in revised form
07th October, 2017
Accepted 20th November, 2017
Published online 30th December, 2017

Key Words:

Water, Food and livelihoods, religion,
Culture and traditional way of life
Livelihood and cpr, recent development of
vedanta project and gramasabha details.

ABSTRACT

Woman has not even been referred to in any of the state policies. Only through the court can she file for claim in the monetary compensation received by her husband. She will not be titled to a separate package. A deserted woman with three India has been undertaking development project to improve the quality of life of its people through "planned development" under the successive five-year plans. Such projects include dams, power, mining, industrial and allied infrastructures, transport network, urban development, 3commercial forestry and other projects. Some of these projects have brought adverse effects in the form of displacement of people from their original place of habitation due to large-scale land accusation. My study is to focus on women's plight and suffering caused due to development induced displacement in two mega projects such as Vedanta in Lanjigarh and POSCO in Paradeep in Odisha. Some specific objectives are analyzed in the context of globalization vs development projects its impact on women on this papers.

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Citation: Dr. Ranjita Behera, 2017. "Impacts of displacement: understanding women's impoverishment and recent developments", *International Journal of Development Research*, 7, (12), 18146-18150.

INTRODUCTION

India's decision to reject a London miner's request to mine bauxite on tribal landmarks a major victory for human rights in the country. For too long, tribal communities have been pushed off their land in the name of development and industrialisation, their attempts to defend their lands brushed aside or brutally suppressed. The Dongria Kondh's determination to protect Niyamgiri hills from the mining heavyweight Vedanta Resources has paid off, despite the state government's complicity in the \$2bn project. Like many tribal communities worldwide, the Dongria have a strong connection to their land. They have expert knowledge of local forests, plants and wildlife – families grow more than 100 crops and gather food from the forests including mangoes, mushrooms and honey. The 8,000-strong community has been campaigning against the mining project for almost a decade amid alleged intimidation by paramilitary police and local goons. As the Dongria leader, Lodu Sikaka, put it: "We'll lose our self-esteem if they take away our hills and forests. Other Adivasis [India's tribal peoples] who have lost their homes are dying of desperation; they are being destroyed.

Earlier they used to till their land but now they are only drinking without working. They have become kind of beggars". The proposed Vedanta mining project threatens to undermine the traditional land rights and religious beliefs of the Dongria Kondh. It also poses serious risks to their rights to water, food, work an adequate standard of living and their cultural rights. The streams which originate from the top of the Hills are the only source of water for communities who live on top of the Hills and a major source for others who live lower down the hill (some of these villages have tube wells), in a region that receives limited rainfall through many months of the year and is often subject to drought conditions. Any negative impacts on the streams, through pollution or disruption of water re-charging capacity and drainage patterns or any other effects on the quantity and quality of water could have disastrous consequences for the communities, most of whom are completely dependent on this water in order to continue to live on the Hills. The Dongria Kondh woman leader, said, "What will happen when they take away the bauxite from the top of the hill? We know that our water sources are dependent on the hill. Once you make holes in the hill and take away the bauxite, water storage will be affected. All water will run down the mountain instead of being stored. You have walked up to here, you have seen so many streams,

**Corresponding author: Dr. Ranjita Behera,*
WSRC, Berhampur University, Odisha, India.

you have taken baths in the streams – did you see any rain? So the water comes all through the year, regardless of the rain situation. If they mine, we are worried that this water will not be available.” Another Dongria Kondh woman who lives in one of the hamlets closest to the proposed mine site said, “Water is life... if we lose our Hills, and we lose our food and water.” Concerns about the impact of mining on water were shared by some people from other communities who live on the hills and in and around Lanjigarh. They have also been echoed by environmental activists who have argued that the bauxite deposits on top of the hills are crucial for ensuring a perennial slow water supply in the low rainfall seasons because of the porous nature and high water retention capacity of bauxite. According to the Supreme Court-appointed CEC, the protected Niyamgiri Hills constitute the “origin of Vamsadharariver and other rivulets” and there is a likelihood of “adverse effect of mining on bio-diversity and availability of water for the local people.” In addition, the CEC noted that the mining project could result in soil erosion, affecting the flora and fauna in the entire region and this should be studied in-depth by reputed institutions. “Water is life... if we lose our Hills, we lose our food and water.” A Dongria Kondh woman, Niyamgiri Hills. The mining project also poses risks to the natural environment in the region, which the communities depend on for their own food and livelihoods. The main risks are posed by the cutting down of forests for the mine site and related infrastructure, noise, blasting and other impacts of the mining operations themselves and management of waste produced as a result of the mining operations. These concerns were reflected in the testimonies collected from the communities.

Religion, culture and traditional way of life

Many members of the Dongria Kondh communities were upset about the proposal to mine an area that they consider to be sacred and inhabited by a deity that they worship. A Dongria Kondh man explained: “We do not cut down trees on top of the hill, we will only ever remove some branches if needed, and because we believe that the trees provide shade to Niyam Raja. If the company cuts trees at the top of the hill, this would be a problem for us.” Another man said, “We do not cultivate at the top of the hill because it supports life in the rest of the hill. If you harm the brain, how will the body work?” A Dongria Kondh man told, “Our language, the way we dress, songs, marriage rituals, worship of Niyam Raja, our livelihoods are all linked to these Hills and the way we live here. We have seen what happens to other Adivasis when they are forced to leave their traditional lands, they lose everything.” A Dongria Kondh man, said, “Our people are not educated. If we are forced to leave these Hills because of the mine, we will end up in poorly paid jobs in towns in the plains.” An elderly woman from one of the hamlets near the proposed mine site stated, “If we have lakhs or crores of [Indian] rupees, how many days will it last, but this mountain will last generations.” “Our message to the company and Sarkar [the government] is simple. We will sit together, us Dongria people, and decide directly.” S. M., a Dongria Kondh woman leader in the Niyamgiri Hills.

Livelihood and CPR

The forested slopes of the Niyamgiri hills and the many streams that flow through them provide the means of living for DongriaKondh and Kutia Kondh, Scheduled Tribes that are

notified by the government as ‘Primitive Tribal Groups’ and thus eligible for special protection. While the Kutia Kondh inhabit the foothills, the Dongaria Kondh live in the upper reaches of the Niyamgiri hills which is their only habitat. In the polytheistic animist worldview of the Kondh, the hilltops and their associated forests are regarded as supreme deities. The highest hill peak, which is under the proposed mining lease area, is the home of their most revered god, Niyam Raja, ‘the giver of law’. They worship the mountains (*dongar* from which the Dongaria Kondh derive their name) along with the earth (*dharini*). These male and female principles come together to grant the Kondh prosperity, fertility and health. As Narendra Majhi, a Kutia Kondh from Similibhata village, said, ‘We worship Niyam Raja and Dharini Penu. That is why we don’t fall ill’. Sikoka Lodo, a Dongaria Kondh from Lakpadar village said, ‘As long as the mountain is alive, we will not die’. Dongaria Kondh art and craft reflect the importance of the mountains to their community their triangular shapes recur in the designs painted on the walls of the village shrine as well as in the colourful shawls that they wear. All the Dongria and Kutia Kondh villagers that the Committee conversed with emphasized the connection between their culture and the forest ecology of the Niyamgiri hills. Their belief in the sacredness of the hills is rooted in a strong dependence on the natural resources that the mountains provide. Their customary practices in the area include agriculture, grazing and the collection of minor forest produce (MFP). The Kutia Kondh in Similibhata village and Kendubardi use the foothills to cultivate cereals such as *mandia* (ragi, finger millet), *kosla* (foxtail millet), *kangoand kedjana*, pulses such as *kandlo* (tuvar, pigeon pea), *biri* (urad, black Gram), *kulath* (horse Gram) and *jhudungo*, as well as oilseeds like castor and linseed (*alsi*). Two women, Malladi Majhi and Balo Majhi, while showing us their millet stores said, ‘This is why we need the forest. All these things come only from the forest’. We can buy rice [at Rs 2 per kilo], but these [millets] are tastier and more filling’. Their cows and buffaloes spend six months grazing in the forest. They listed some of the items that they collect from the forest: different kinds of edible tubers (*bhatkand*, *pitakand*, *mundikand*); mahua flowers, *siali* (Bauhinia) leaves and *jhunu* (aromatic resin from the sal tree) for sale; and bamboo and wood (for implements and fuel) for their own use. Different parts of the PML are identified by specific local names depending on the nature of the vegetation.

The grassland edge area of the PML is locally known as Aonlabhata for the large number of amla (*Embliaofficinalis*) trees found on the plateau which the Kondh harvest for medicinal use and for sale. With small land holdings that average 1-2 acres, the Kutia Kondh of Similibhata depend heavily on the forest for their livelihoods. Since the forest resource satisfy the bulk of their material needs, only four households out of 50 supplement their income with wage labour. The tiny community of Dongaria Kondh, who live in the upland areas of the Niyamgiri hills, depend on the hills even more intensely. Their distinctive cultural identity is intrinsically linked to the Niyamgiri hills where they have crafted a diverse and intricate agro-forestry system that uses mountain slopes and streams to great advantage. Dongaria Kondh cultivate patches of land cleared from the forest that are rotated to maintain soil fertility. Since their population is very small, they regard land as plentiful and leave most of it forested. Besides the crops mentioned above, the Dongaria Kondh also cultivate bajra (pearl millet) and beans such as *kating* (lobhia, cow pea) and *sem* (broad bean, *Lablab*

purpureus). However, the skill that they are renowned for is horticulture: pineapple, banana, orange, lime, mango, jackfruit, turmeric and ginger. This produce grown on forest plots fetch them a handsome income throughout the year. In addition, they collect a variety of forest produce: all the ones mentioned above as well as edible mushrooms and honey (both these items are important sources of nutrition in the Kondh diet as well as marketable commodities that fetch them a good income), edible leaves (*koliari*, *betka* and *kodikucha*) and tubers, grasses for making brooms, and herbs for medicinal use. They also rear chicken, pigs, goats and buffaloes.

Special mention must be made to the livestock that the Dongaria Kondh rear, especially the buffaloes that have particular cultural importance for them. Livestock is not reared for milk but for draught and meat. Buffaloes are highly valued for ritual purposes religious and wedding-related festivities involve the sacrifice of buffaloes. Their biggest festival, Meria, is celebrated every three years in the month of Magh (January-February). During this festival, buffaloes are offered to Niyam Raja and their blood is allowed to seep into the earth. Buffalo meat is eaten fresh and dried for later use. Payments of bride-price also usually include one or two buffaloes. The maintenance of buffaloes is a challenge, because pasturage is scarce on the hill slopes where the villages are located. Hence villagers' customary rights to graze livestock in the forest is crucial for their livelihood economy. When the Committee visited the grassy plateau that forms the PML area, we found a herd of fifty buffaloes grazing. Since they were unaccompanied by any person, the village they belonged to could not be ascertained. Traces of old campfires at the edge of the plateau indicated that the area is used extensively and regularly by cattle and their herders. Given that the PML has excellent grass growth, this large number of buffaloes on the site was not surprising. In discussions with villagers in the neighbouring villages of Rengopali, Bandhaguda and Kendupardi, the Committee was repeatedly informed that their cattle graze on the PML for substantial lengths of time, ranging from four months to eight months each year, as part of their customary rights.

The Dongaria Kondh from Kurli, Khambesi and Lakpadar villages to whom we spoke appeared to be substantially better off than the Kutia Kondh of Similibhata and Kendubardi villages. Their crops, animals and forest produce not only provide them with enough food for self-consumption (*mandia* and *kosla* are their staples), but also fetch them substantial returns from the market. One indication of this economic well-being is the bride-price recently paid in the Dongaria Kondh village of Lakpadar. Besides a *jhaula* payment of Rs 8000 to the bride's village for a community feast, the bride's family was given a *maula* payment of Rs 50,000 in cash, two buffaloes, 20 kg of rice, 10 kg of ragi, salt, chillies and two canisters of mahua liquor. Despite the scale of such outlay, no funds were borrowed from moneylenders. This self-sufficiency is a testimony to the prosperity of the upland hill economy. This entire sum was raised by the sale of agricultural and forest produce. Notably, no one in the village has ever worked for wages. The Dongaria Kondh we met were proud of their economic independence and freedom from want. Over and over again, they attributed their well-being and contentment to the Niyamgiri hills and their bounty. An elderly woman commenting on the decision to annex the community's burial grounds on the common village land at Bandaguda for the refinery, "Where will they put me to rest when I die? Perhaps

you can ask the company to bury me under their chimney. It should be able to do this much as it has deceived us and pushed us to part with our land". The loss of shared community resources has undermined livelihoods and disrupted traditional community practices. This has had a particularly negative impact on people who had no land, and who relied on other people's farmland as a source of labour, and on using communal land to graze their cattle and gather food. A man in his early thirties from Chhattarpur, described his predicament: "I owned 6goats, 15 cows and 2 buffaloes. They used to graze in common land where the factory stands today. It became difficult to take them for grazing, and buying fodder is very expensive so I have now sold all the cattle. We used to have home-made milk products to eat but now I have to buy milk from outside." Another man from Bandaguda provided a similar account: "I also used to work as an agriculture labourer in a nearby field where the factory stands now. Even though I was earning 40 to 50 [Indian] rupees (around US\$ 1) daily, it was enough, as we could access vegetables, forest produce and wood freely. We had at least one vegetable every day. Now, if I earn 70 [Indian] rupees (US\$ 1.50) daily it is very difficult to eat good food as we have to buy everything from the market. There is a marked increase in the price of, say, tomatoes, which used to cost five [Indian] rupees and are now 20 [Indian] rupees due to so many new people. Life has become very hard now. I want to feed my three children regular milk but can't. I miss my life before the factory. It was more comfortable." "It's really getting tougher and tougher," said 29-year-old woman, L. S.: "I had four cows but have sold them, as I have no access to common grazing land. Previously, my cows used to graze where the factory stands. We had some amount of milk that was used for consumption and sometimes sold. Now, if we have money [we can] buy milk; otherwise milk is no longer a regular part of my family's diet".

Recent development of Vedanta project an gramasabha

According to Supreme Court order of 18th April, Government of Odisha had selected seven villages of Rayagada and five villages of Kalahandi districts to hold Gram sabha from 18th July to 19th August where people will decide whether bauxite mining in Niyamgiri will be permitted to Vedanta. More than 400 Dongriakondh from other villages in Niyamgiri and around 100 outsiders including International NGOs like Actionaid, Survival International, Amnesty International, local NGO representatives, and local and national media persons observed this Gram Sabha. Tribal activist KumutiMajhi of Niyamgiri Surakhya Samity, InduNetam from Chattishgarh, Bidulata Huika of Odisha Adivasi Manch, Lingaraj from Farmer's Movement, Environmentalist Prafullasamantara, Lingaraj Azad, Bhala Sadangi of Lok Sangram Manch witnessed the meeting on the hill top that said clear no to mining in Niyamgiri. The serene Niyamgiri hills, a chain of 4,500-ft high mountains, is spread across 20 km in Kalahandi and Rayagada districts and inhabited by about 2,000 Dongria Kondhs.

Details of Gram sabhas held

1. Serkapadi-July 18

The first of 12 Gram Sabhas was held at Serkapadi in Rayagada district. The tribal inhabitants put forth their views

in the presence of district judge Sarat Chandra Mishra, host of officials, NGO activists and media persons. The villagers made it clear that mining of bauxite at Niyamgiri hills would adversely affect their religious and cultural life along with their livelihood. "We will not leave Niyamgiri. This is our place". "Niyamgiri is our father, mother, God and main source of livelihood. We will prefer to die than leave the hills to Vedanta or any other company for mining of bauxite". These were some of the statements by 36 voters whose opinions were ascertained in the Gram Sabha as per the April 18 order of the Supreme Court.

2. Kesarpadi -July 22

At the second pallasabha meeting, the Dongaria Kondhs of Kesarpadi under Muniguda block articulated the same view as those of their counterparts of Serkapadi. Of the 36 eligible voters of the village, 33 inclusive of 23 eligible female members, turned up for the decisive meeting, the start of which was delayed by 40 minutes due to heavy rains. "The Niyamgiri hill range is our resource and the Niyam Raja is our God. The hills offers us food, water and livelihood throughout the year and we are not going to quit it", Dundu Kutruka, a tribal said. All of them said no to mining in Niyamgiri.

3. Tadijholala- 23 July

However, the third gram sabha has raised several questions. The village, which has 22 voters, has no tribal population. Most of the villagers are from Goud community and belong to the OBC, but they are accepted as traditional forest-dwellers. Of course this time the outsiders were restricted to be present close to the meeting place as happened at Sekarpadi and Keasrpadi. In the meeting place, Vedanta people were also available. It was feared that since it is OBC village, Vedanta people could influence the Gram sabha, but it was resulted in a good outcome. The Gram Sabha meeting was observed by the Vigilance Judge Pramod Kumar Jena instead of Girish Kumar Mishra who was appointed earlier for the purpose. "It took me one hour to trek the distance. I have not seen such a remote village, where there is no school, hospital, power and other facilities," he told *The Hindu*. He was accompanied by a medicine specialist from Government District Hospital, Bhawanipatna, Dr. Dinabandhu Sahu. During the gram sabha, which lasted for three hours, Sugri Goud, an 87-year-old woman traditional healer, said "Niyamgiri provides them everything and they will not allow mining either by the government, Vedanta or any other company. We are ready to die as we cannot think of life without Niyamraja." Of the 19 adults who attended, 10 were men and nine women. All the villagers later asked the judge to convey their feelings to the Supreme Court.

4. Kunakhadu-24 July

The villagers of Kunakada, a Dongaria Kondh village in Kalahandi district, today unanimously rejected the proposal for mining in Niyamgiri, claiming community and religious rights over the entire hill range. "Niyamgiri, the abode of Niyama Raja, is like the Puri Jagannath temple for us. The hill range belongs to us. We can't leave it at any cost", said Tanguru Majhi, the village head at the meeting conveyed by the gram panchayat to decide the fate of bauxite mining project. All 21 out of 22 voters, who attended the meeting, voiced their opposition to the mining project. As many as 11 male and 10

female voters were present in the meeting held under the supervision of additional district judge (vigilance), PK Jena. Ward member Sulochana Gouda presided.

5. Palberi-25 July

Tribal people express their opinion at fifth gram sabha held at Palberi village. Men and women who participated in the gram sabha held at Palberi village in Kalahandi district on Thursday rejected the proposed bauxite mining project in Niyamgiri hills. The gram sabha passed a resolution to oppose the proposed mining tooth and nail, with the residents claiming that Niyamgiri is their revered deity and source of their livelihood. Out of 15 eligible voters, 14 persons with equal number of male and female who took part in the gram sabha claimed their religious and cultural rights over Niyamgiri hills. Kalahandi MP Bhakta Das was present in this Gram Sabha. "We don't want to part with Niyamgiri as we worship it. The hills have given us food, shelter, water and everything," said village headman of Batudi Dukhi Shyam Jakasika. At least 31 voters, including 18 women, out of the total 40 voters were present.

6. Batudi -July 27

Batudi village situates in Sibapadar Grampanchayat under Muniguda block in Rayagada district. 31 (Male 13 female 18) out of 40 voters have participated in the Gramsabha and kept their views in front of district judge and they claimed their traditional religious, cultural and community rights over the entire Niyamgiri hills. They also claimed their livelihood dependency on Niyamgiri forest. At the outset the govt. officials presented the verification report of the CFR claims under FRA 2006 which was made by the community of Batudi village. Dangoriakondhs of Batudi village unanimously rejected the joint verification report on community rights and community forest resource rights claims made by them and the Mining Proposal in Niyamgiri terrain in the Gramsabha today. They stated that the area and the types of rights placed in the joint verification report are not according to their claim.

7. Phuldumer-29 July

The seventh Gram Sabha held at Phuldumer in Kalahandi district on Monday passed a resolution unanimously rejecting the proposed bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri hills. Out of total 65 voters of the village as many as 49, including 32 women, took part in the Gram Sabha proceedings and strongly opposed the proposed bauxite mining in Niyamgiri. The residents said that they would not allow destruction of Niyamgiri at any cost. Interestingly, Vedanta Aluminium Limited had covered Phuldumer under its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

8. Ijurupa- 30 July

The 8th gram sabha organised at Ijurupa village in Kalahandi district on Tuesday rejected the proposal for bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri hills. There is only one household belonging to Gouda Caste who has recently staying in the village and even there is no mention of their staying even in the 2001 Census. The NSS claimed this village as ineligible village for holding Gram Sabha and disapproved the Odisha Govt.'s selection for holding Gram Sabha in the village. There is also sufficient evidence probing how the district administration was trying to

bring 6 to 7 families from other villages Chhatrapur of Chhatrapur Gram Panchayat constructing new huts in the village. But, when the issue was raised in the media the district administration took back step and stopped that attempt. While in the last voter list there was only one Voter in the Village Ijurupa, 4 voters were found in the very recently revised voter list in 2013 including the Old man Lavanya Gouda, his wife, his son and daughter in law. Thus the Gram was held in Village Ijurupa taking these 4 persons and even they also have rejected any mining in the Niyamgiri Hills.

9. Lamba- August 1

The tribal people of Lamba village in Rayagada district on Thursday unanimously voted against the plan to mine bauxite atop Niyamagiri hills, making it the ninth special Gram sabha to reject the project. Braving heavy rains and amid tight security, as many as 38 voters (18 male and 20 females) of Lamba village expressed their views against the mining project in the hill at the pallisabha, like their fellow villagers in other villages.

10. Lakhpadar-Aug 8

The 10th Gram Sabha was held at village Lakhpadar of Parsali G.P of the K.Singhpur Block of Rayagarda District. This village is the largest village in terms of numbers of Voters. The villagers again have rejected mining in Niyamgiri casting 97 votes (58 female and 39 male) out of the total 130 voters. Around 600 people from the periphery villages witnessed the Gram Sabha meeting. Tribal activist Lado Sikaka belongs to this village which also increased the Gram sabha's importance in the row of Gram Sabhas being held in the Niyamgiri. "Our God lives in open space. You keep your God locked with a key. We won't leave Niyamgiri. If the government and politicians ask for it we will fight. Why do police destroy our fields and crops in the name of combing Maoists? Withdraw them immediately," said Lado Sikaka, a prominent anti-Vedanta Dongaria tribal from Pottangapadar hamlet. The presence of two foreigners at Lakhpadar village and their taking pictures of DongriaKondhs, categorized as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), has put the government on the back foot.

After this incident Collector of Rayagada Sashi Bhusan Padhi has put restriction for foreigners and foreign journalist to attend Gram Sabha. The duo, Dean Nelson and Simon William, claimed to be journalists of one English daily published from London.

11. Khambesi-Aug13

The Gram Sabha or village meeting at Khambesi village in Rayagada district unanimously rejected the proposal with all its 72 members, including 49 women, saying no. The members said the mining would severely affect their socio-cultural and religious rights over Niyamgiri as they considered the hills to be their presiding deity. Rayagada district judge Sarat Chandra Mishra attended the meeting as observer at the village comprising 23 Dongria Kondh families. It was a historic event as the majority of people voted against the project. All of them said no to the project with an overwhelming majority.

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