

Dam displaced adivasis accused of forest encroachment

Poorly rehabilitated, adivasi families displaced by the Malay Dam in 1983 in Palamu of Jharkhand are now accused of encroaching on forest land. Report by Gladson Dungdung



The Chero Adivasi, displaced of Malay Dam

block of Palamu district in Jharkhand, discloses the truth of how the displaced struggle for survival after being betrayed in the name of compensation, rehabilitation and development.

These Adivasis had been living in Katautia and Dodang villages for generations, now submerged by the reservoir of the Malay Dam. They had adequate agricultural land, where they used to cultivate paddy, wheat, mustard, pulse and vegetables for their consumption and the surpluses were sold in the local market to meet other needs. 70 year-old Ganeshi who owned 29.85 acres of fertile land, received merely Rs 36,000 as compensation and became a daily wage labourer says, "My family members were never used to earning livelihood from daily wages. We had more than enough land to sustain our families for years." "None of 56 families had ever been labourers but we were simply betrayed in the name of rehabilitation. Now we have only daily wages as a major source to sustain our families," he added. According to the Land Acquisition Act 1894, the affected families must be served a notice prior to land acquisition.

The adivasis, mostly the victims of the development



process in India, rarely reap the benefits of it. The three buzz words – compensation, rehabilitation and development—are widely propagated during the land acquisition for dams, industries, mining

Malay Dam Salient features:

Year of completion:	1985
River:	Malay
Nearest city:	Daltonganj
Ht above lowest foundation:	28.80 m
Length of the dam:	1684.15 m
Type:	Earthen
Purpose:	Irrigation
Submergence area:	346 ha
Design spillway capacity:	490 cubic m per sec

(Source: National Register of Large Dams, Central Water Commission, 2009)

Here, the construction of dam was initiated in 1980 without any information. The purpose of dam was to irrigate approximately 65 000 acres of land in three

development blocks – Satbarwa, Lesliganj and Daltonganj. The Adivasis were promised adequate compensation for their land, government jobs to one person from all 56 families and rehabilitation with all facilities including hospital, school, drinking water, paved road and

The agony of 56 Chero adivasi families who were displaced in 1983 during the construction of Malay Dam, situated at Satbarwa block of Palamu district in Jharkhand, discloses the truth of how the displaced struggle for survival after being betrayed in the name of compensation, rehabilitation and development.

electricity. Their village was supposed to be a model for the district.

But even these promises did not convince the Adivasis to leave their ancestral land. They resisted the displacement.

According to 65 year-old Budhan, their fight with the police with their traditional weapons including bows and arrows continued till the dam was almost ready in 1983, when they were asked to vacate the village.

When they refused, the police arrived at night, put them in trucks and were taken to the Land Acquisition Office in Daltonganj and locked up. They were threatened with dire consequences if attempted an escape. "Police told us if we agreed to vacate the village we are safe. Otherwise our remaining goods would go under water," said Budhan.

Finally, the Adivasis were dumped in a new area and the village was named "Kushikarma". They were compensated for their multi-cropping land at Rs 2000 per acre, plus the revenue from the Rabi harvest. All 56 families were given plots in the hilly area for their houses. But merely 34 of them were given government jobs as peons in the irrigation department, 22 of them are still in the waiting list. Their struggle for livelihood began in their new village situated in the hills, where only maize could be cultivated. They started clearing trees and bushes for agriculture to sustain their families, but the forest department termed them encroachers. They filed cases against all 56 families alleging they were cutting trees and encroaching on forest land. A few of them were put behind bars but escaped after bribing the forest officials.

When Bhudhan cleared bushes to grow crops, he was thrown behind bars for a year and is still not off the legal hook. He fears going to jail a second time. The nightmare of displacement has stayed with him.

He says, "We had demanded that they shoot all 56 families rather than move us to some barren land. This would have spared us of the pain of having to die

everyday. The local MLA Indarsingh Namdhari was for the dam. He had said that as long as the Palamu farmers got water for their land, the submergence would not be a cause for concern.

The water from the Malay dam never reached to the proposed areas of Lesliganj, where 10 Dalits families died of starvation in 2004. They were agricultural labourers but did not get work due to drought. Ironically, the canal from the dam passes close to the rehabilitated village "Kushikarma" but never reaches them. If the displaced people had gotten water to irrigate their barren land, they could have gone for two crops.

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The state cabinet of Jharkhand has passed the Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy 2008, but this does not cover the already rehabilitated. But, if the government cannot rehabilitate a mere 56 families, how will they rehabilitate the huge numbers it is displacing in the name of development now?

35 year-old Lalan was merely 10 years old when his family was asked to part with their 21.62 acres of land, providing for their subsistence. Apart from the monetary compensation package and the plot for the house, his brother was given the job of the peon in the irrigation department. When the family settled down at Kushikarma village, Lalan started clearing bushes and

prepared a few patches of land. But his desperate hunt for livelihood was soon declared illegal. The case against him, again, for encroaching on forest land was only withdrawn after bribing a forest department official.

Breaking the promises given to them, the Kushikarma village still does not have a school or a health centre.

Only 30 families remain in the village, others have migrated. A few of them returned to the dam site where they at least get

the opportunity to cultivate the Rabi crop and fish in the reservoir. The state cabinet of Jharkhand has passed the Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy 2008, but this does not cover the already rehabilitated. But, if the government cannot rehabilitate a mere 56 families, how will they rehabilitate the huge numbers it is displacing in the name of development? The 'development' and displacement have only begun.

Gladson Dungdung gladsonhractivist@gmail.com