

“Hum apni zameen apna astitva nabi denge”

The sun and the heat could not deter 600 *Adivasis* from 11 *Gram Panchayats* to gather together in Kamdara Village in support of their *Parha Raja* who unwaveringly declared “*ek inch bhi zameen nabin denge*”(we will not give even an inch of land) to Arcelor Mittal or to any other lopsided development process. Simultaneously 3 other villages Soyko, Bano and Pimpi witnessed similar gatherings of thousands of *Adivasis* coming forward with CNISBSS staff to Speak Out.

Adivasis have always been the victims of all forms of development policies and are being deliberately deprived of their life sustaining resources i.e. land, water & forest. But not anymore, ‘*Adivasi Moolvasi Astitva Raksha Manch*’ - a people’s movement is actively and effectively advocating the plight of *Adivasis* and fighting against land grabbing in Jharkhand.

DBSS Chotanagpur has been actively involved in the struggle of *Adivasis* of the area ever since the problem has begun along with other organizations in the affected region. DBSS with the help of village committees of the affected villages organized awareness meetings in 73 villages and motivated people to raise their voices and stand up for their assertion of rights. A number of rallies and *dharnas* have been organized so far in all the affected blocks and district headquarters as also in the capital city of Ranchi. Mass meetings and rallies were organized on the 4th of March 2008 in Karra, 7th March 2008 in Kamdara, 10th March 2008 in Torpa and 25th March 2008 in Raniya in which memorandums were submitted to government officials not to initiate any process for land transfer for the company.

Today the *Adivasis* from this region are challenging the prevailing form of ‘development’ and are talking of ‘people-centred development’. The vibrancy and resoluteness to fight against anti-people development planning is witnessed by several affected places like Karra, Torpa, Kamdara and Raniya blocks in the districts of Gumla, Khunti and Simdega in Jharkhand.

CNISBSS staff, as an Accompanier’ visited these communities, engaged in their struggle, to learn more about their plight and discuss ways and means in which we could effectively participate with them. We received overwhelming response from them. Together with DBSS and community, we worked on a plan to translate such community mobilisation to be a people’s movement working towards protecting rights of tribal and their access and control over jal, jangal and jameen. As a process of accompaniment and community mobilisation were held in Kamdara (Ramtolya & Pimpi) Bano (Buruirgi/Chirubera), and Soyko (Kolme/Rugdi).

The state of Jharkhand, since its formation in the year 2000 has already signed 98 MOUs with the industrialists. The total land required for all the 98 projects would be around 500,000 hectares and undoubtedly would displace thousands of villages of *Adivasi* habitat. According to the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy (R&R Policy) which was passed recently says ‘every cultivable land has to be replaced by cultivable land’ but the question is, where would the government get so much land from? Furthermore, if the land is acquired by the company itself, the provisions as per the R&R Policy would not be followed. The government of Jharkhand has deliberately ignored the fact that the region where the land is given to Mittal comes under the Fifth Scheduled Area and thus the state itself is indulging in illegal sale of land. More so, *Adivasi land is also protected by Constitutional provisions such as the Chotanagpur Tennancy Act 1908*. Land grabbing is now ‘official’ in Jharkhand.

One of the beneficiaries of the MOU is the *Arcelor Mittal Company* which would require 25000 acres of land for setting up of a steel manufacturing plant displacing around 25000 families from 44

villages affecting a total population of 53,264, 37,943 are *Adivasis* out of them 5,873 are BPL families.

A number of organizations and movement groups like INSAF Jharkhand; *Jameen Bachao Sangathan*, Karra; *Adivasi Moolvasi Raksha Manch*, Torpa; Block level *Gram Sabha*, Kamdara; and DBSS, Chotanagpur are involved in raising the voices of *Adivasis* for restoring the land which the *Arcelor Mittal Company* is planning to grab.

The *Parha Raja* said that they were going to continue with their People's Movement. They could use some help and support from CNISBSS and the organisations of the like to strengthen this movement. There is a need to link their movement with other such movements in Jharkhand, and with other Civil Society Organisations. They could use the involvement media in supporting this People's Organisation to reach to the higher echelons of bureaucracy, judiciary and administration of the state and Nation. These legitimate expectations of the people reminded the staff of SBSS who are accompanying the communities of their roles and responsibilities towards them.

As of now the movement has grown up to be a strong one under the banner of *Adivasi Moolvasi Astitva Raksha Manch* which is effectively advocating the plight of the *Adivasis* in the state. In spite of pressure from state allurements of hard cash, *AMARM* resolved not to give up their land to the company. They demanded no development should take place at the cost of displacement. Right to access and control over forest produce and land entitlement need to be protected. Government should cancel MOUs that have denied tribals their share in development forcing migration for livelihood. Further they realised that there is need to elect representative to parliament and assemble who can feel this pain and concern about tribal identity. CNI SBSS and DBSS also committed their involvement and support to take this struggle forward and protect life, livelihood and identity of tribal.

We will together fight against the forces that are depriving the *Adivasis* of their land rights and forcing them to leave it in the name of development. We are with them in helping them retain their land and identity, like the youths passionately cried out "*hum apni zameen apna astitva nabi denge*" (we will not give up our land.....our identity).