



Stakeholders in the mining conflict in Odisha

A tribal child who doesn't go to school

I live in the central part of Odisha, near the mountains. This is a rural area, and it is remote, and difficult to get to. I wake up when the sun rises and go to the small pond and take a bath. Then I come back home and have my breakfast. For most of our meals we have rice water, vegetables, and fruits, whatever is in season in the forest.

I love to spend time playing with my friends. I have so many friends here. I am really very happy here.

My father is a farmer, so he goes to the fields and sometimes I help him. In the home my mum is a housewife, so I help her with housework like cooking, cleaning and washing clothes. Twice a day I collect drinking water from the nearest well.

In the evening we eat before the sun goes down. Although we do have oil lamps, we don't have electricity so usually once the sun goes down the children go to bed.



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A child at a village school

The mining company wanted our land so my family had to move and live in a small camp village in the Sambalpur district of Odisha. There was a small school, up to class 5, in my village just three years ago. But my school now has giant classes forced into small rooms in a community centre building that is also used by the security guards of the mining company.

I do not really like this at all and don't feel like I am learning much. Sometimes my mum talks about sending me to the other nearest school but she fears the journey there along a main road to the mine, with fast, heavy trucks day and night. The drivers are sometimes very careless.

Life is far more precious than education! That's what my mum always says. My parents didn't go to school, but because they are not educated they cannot fight for our rights.



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A child at boarding school (mainstreamed)

I am fifteen years old. I'm from a remote tribal area of Odisha. I live in a boarding school for 4,000 students, a Tribal School in Bhubaneswar. I go back to my home in the summer holidays for six weeks.

We get up at 5 o'clock and go for a bath. At 6 o'clock I have breakfast and then we have a practical class from 7am. After 9am we study for some time, pray to God and then class, and then lunch.

The food is different to the food in the village. In the village, we get lots of fresh fruit and vegetables because we grow them and harvest them from the forest. At school we have rice and lentils with some vegetables mixed in. After lunch we have classes until 4 or 5, then I go to my room and rest a little. After that we study some more.

In the future I want to be an engineer. If I work in a multinational company I will provide money for our tribal development, which is very poor. If I get a job in government in India and work in a rural area as an engineer, I could provide them with transport systems, electricity, piped water, and so on. I want to help our tribal communities to survive and develop.

I would like to create a programme of awareness for tribal people, helping them to understand about government, society and systems. If you want to achieve anything, you have to go through existing systems.



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A tribesman living off the forest

The main problem with the mining companies for me is the loss of our forest resources. During the pre-mining period, this area was full of sal tree forest (very valuable, hard wood).

We tribal villagers were dependent on the things that grow in the forest to live, and to earn our livelihood. We collected various forest products like firewood, timber and resin, which added to our family income. But this shrinking of forest land due to mining and related activities has led to a much smaller area from which to collect resources. Less to sell means a much lower income for me and my family.

Every day I can see that huge areas have been dug for extraction of metal ores like bauxite, that trees have been cut down and those that are left are in very bad condition. In every tribal village there are traditional healers. They used to collect various herbs and leaves for their medicines, but many of them have stopped doing that because of the huge loss of medicinal plants.

Only a few of us can read and write. The chances of us getting jobs doing any sort of industrial activity are very limited. Anyway, we prefer our village life.



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A tribesman forced off the land

Since we have been forced off our traditional tribal land, not only are we landless, but also out of work. I used to use the forest resources to provide for my family, and to sell and make a living. I used to sell sal tree, (very hard, valuable wood), timber and firewood. Now all of that is lost. I am looking for work but it is difficult as I cannot read or write. I belong in the hills and I want to go back there. To me the hills are sacred and I should never have been asked to leave. I believe that that our nature gods are in the tribal hills. My family has lived there for many, many generations. I will fight to get my land back.

The mining company that took my land says that bauxite is the most important of the metal ores. They can turn bauxite into aluminium, an important metal for many industries, helping India to get richer. I want my country to grow and develop with respect and dignity for all its people, not just the big multinational companies who took my land. We will fight!



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A worker in the mines

I used to be a farmer but luckily I got a job from the multinational mining company and I now work for them in the mines. I say lucky, since it means I now earn a living, but it is really, really hard work. My boss told me that because I have a good level of skill and I am also cheap to employ, I should be alright for the next ten years at least. That makes me happy. I need money to look after my family and my dream is to send my kids to the best school so that they can get a good education and do important work for our country.

I have seen good progress in India over the last few years. I have seen a change from a farming economy to a mining-based one and I am part of that change. I used to spend my time in the fields but now I spend my time in the mines.

I am always exhausted when I get home and only manage to get a few hours' sleep before I get up and do the same all over again. The mineral that I mine is called bauxite and when you process it, it becomes aluminium, a metal that my company can sell for lots of money. It's a very hard job but I want a better life than working in the fields. So that is why, overall, I am happy.