

Women-Lores from India

A quarterly e-newsletter



In this newsletter we bring you stories from the ground shared by women in the forests of India. The International Women’s Day on 8th March has been gaining increasing visibility among poor women too as an important emotional space for assertion of collective demands. March is also a month identified for the urgent call to protect our water bodies, especially ground water. ‘Making the Invisible Visible’ as a tag-line of UN Water and UNESCO also mirrors the need for making visible the invisible and ignored suffering of women world over, where extractives and natural resources exploiting eco-systems, exploit women first.

Yet the [Gender Toolkit](#) for visibility makes for a poor attempt to bring accountability even in sex-disaggregated data on water which does not even include assessment of polluting industries in its conceptual indicators on achieving SDGs on Gender and Water. It gives leverage to an industry like extractives that has mostly walked away from most of its toxic history, whether of air, water or land.

These impacts on women and children are narrated yet again from many community sites. The facetiousness of green projects in trying to divert women’s energy consumption from firewood to alternatives makes for a demonstrable case of criminalizing women, the smallest carbon emitters whose only crime is their need to cook food. Women are left to restore, revive and struggle to maintain resilience as forests stand diverted for more extractives and artificial regeneration projects. That women continue to protect and protest in the face of these colossal challenges, is perhaps the only sustainable string that holds the umbrella of hope in this downpour of climate crisis.

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The United Nations World Water Development Report 2022 'Groundwater: Making the invisible visible'

World Water day was celebrated on March 22 with UNWATER and UNESCO releasing their report on ground water, and emphasizing the need for promoting sex disaggregated data indicators on water monitoring.

Asia and the Pacific region has the lowest per capita water availability in the world, with groundwater use in the region predicted to increase 30 per cent by 2050.



Adivasi Women Meet in Raigarh to share violations faced by women in mining-affected areas and discuss ways to make DMFT funds relevant for women and children.



International Women's Day: Grounded in the Realities and Demands of Women

On International Women's Day, Adivasi and mining affected women gathered in their local areas in different states to demand for their basic entitlements and for accountability to the losses they are facing from irresponsible mining operations -- some legal and many, illegal.

In **Chhattisgarh's** coal and bauxite mining affected villages, women gathered in large numbers to discuss the significance of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act [PESA] and Forest Rights Act [FRA] in claiming their land rights. Water contamination and degeneration of springs and rivers were major concerns that women expressed distress over. With children increasingly suffering from many ailments due to the issue, the women submitted petitions for detoxification of their water sources.

Women in Vidisha submitting their demands to the district collector



In **Madhya Pradesh's Vidisha district**, even elderly women who spent all their lives working as 'criminals' in the illegal stone mines, marched up to their district collectorate to demand for basic schemes and alternative livelihoods. Displaced women from the Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) who are forced to work as illegal mine labourers and migrant construction labourers for their survival, submitted a collective petition for the urgent redress of their grievances -- caused both by the tiger reserve and the occupational illnesses in the mines. Silicosis widows demanded that enhanced facilities for mine workers and their families be included with Covid medical relief measures and DMF funds.



Women in Panna demand basic rights



In the iron-ore mines of **Karnataka's Vijayanagara**, Devadasi women spent the entire month negotiating with ministers and local elected representatives with a clear list of demands for legal and financial entitlements from the DMFT funds.

The Bhil Meena women of **Rajasthan's Udaipur district** submitted claims for settlement of rights under the FRA, and also sought to prevent their CFR lands from being leased out for mine expansion plans.

Women in Udaipur
putting forward
their demands



Chatra in Jharkhand suffers from a long-standing political dispute over recognition of STs relocated from other districts in the state. Intergenerational displacement due to mines, dams and power plants forced many tribals to make Chatra their domicile. ST women and children organized a large public meeting on 8th March to demand for caste certificates and domicile status, the lack of which denies them their constitutional rights of reservation, education and land ownership.



*Swarthi was
felicitated for her
crusade against
child marriage*



Swarthi, our youth community mobiliser from Ganj Basoda, Vidisha, was felicitated for her efforts to prevent child marriage. She received an award from UNICEF and the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare as part of the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' programme during the International Women's Day celebrations of the Madhya Pradesh government. It was a proud moment for both Swarthi and the team.

Restoring and Compensating Forests Diverted for Extractives – Green and Gender Mismatch

The Green India Mission (GIM) and the [Eco-Systems Services Improvement Project \(ESIP\)](#), which is financed by the World Bank to the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, are intended to enhance forest cover, improve ecosystem services and provide “diversified livelihood opportunities” to reduce the forest dependency of local communities.

ESIP is being implemented in North Betul, Sehore and Hoshangabad divisions, and GIM in 14 divisions -- South Balaghat, West Betul, North Betul, Obaidullaganj, Raisen, South Panna, Sheopur, Hoshangabad, South Sagar, South Seoni, Jhabua, Barwani, Sendhwa, Satna. The projects largely include afforestation, alternate energy uses and livelihood support programmes. Rehabilitation of mine sites is one of its components, mainly demonstrated in the abandoned illegal stone quarries of South Panna. Here, approximately six hectares of forest land was taken for raising plantations by fencing the area.

In Betul district, although large-scale coal mining by Western Coalfields Limited (WCL) is reported by local communities to have severely affected forest and tribal lands, the World Bank does not seem to have focused much on rehabilitation of mines, but more on plantation and livelihood programmes. Gender is included as a component in the policy framework of the climate funds investors, be it IFIs or bilateral donors, and both the ESIP and GIM have inputs for women.

However, field visits to these project sites reveal that whether in terms of biodiversity restoration, or of meeting the energy needs or sustainable livelihoods of local women, these investments fall far short of any expectations. Much like the CAMPA plantations, these are fenced off areas with a few species of trees which are mostly young plantations whose survival is too early to predict. In some sites, the forest staff allow local communities to enter the plantation sites for cultural rituals in their sacred groves or to collect grass for their fodder.

In addition, livelihood support programmes like distribution of seeds, setting up vermi-compost pits, nets for collection of forest produce, and other such accessories and training were given. To reduce forest-dependency of local women, cooking stoves, pressure cookers, sewing machines and other such appliances were distributed.

However, many questions remain in the minds of local Adivasi women. The inputs are far too scattered and sparse to impact women’s lives in any substantial way. Women have not been consulted on either planning or working for the envisaged reduction in forest-dependency.



The sewing machines and cookers provided were of little use



On the other hand, women question whether preventing them from entering the forest land by giving a few sewing machines and pressure cookers would address their daily needs of food, firewood or income. The sewing machines remain unutilized as neither skills training nor the complete equipment were given to these few women. Those who received pressure cookers cannot cook in them as they are too small in size and inconvenient. The problems shared by the women in relation to their land and forest rights, food security, livelihood and environmental pollution were disconnected to the interventions under these projects.

Discussions with the women revealed that they had no awareness of the Forest Rights Act and although their lands were taken for the plantations and the mining operations, they could not get recognition or compensation. In most areas, the JFMCs are promoted and not the FRCs, making the FRA irrelevant to the protection of forests or the local communities here.

Discussions with women in Betul



South Panna has several abandoned, closed and operational mines causing severe environmental distress and labour rights violations. Yet, only a small patch of 6-8 hectares of land was taken for restoration. As the DMF funds utilization for Madhya Pradesh is not available in the public domain, it was not possible to understand why the DMF funds were not utilized for mine restoration activities instead of relying on external funding. Similarly, it is not clear why the opportunity for demonstrating the Bank's stated expertise in providing mine closure framework for coal mines retirement was not taken up in ESIP and GIM projects which were implemented in the mining devastated villages.

ESIP closes in July 2023, yet, the local communities remain largely left out of any eco-system services from these fenced off plantations. For women, their struggle for firewood and food is now further constricted by plantations rather than being diversified. The projects demonstrate that the Adivasi women with the smallest carbon footprint are the primary victims of climate actions when they should be the drivers in leading the way on how to sustainably engage with eco-systems and forests.

Energy Alternatives for Women - Neither Fire nor Food

As part of understanding women's energy needs and energy challenges, we conducted micro-level surveys in mining-affected Vidisha, Panna and Chatra on the status of Adivasi women's firewood and cooking practices, and to understand the issues they confront on a daily basis.

"I thought my sorrows finally came to an end when we were told that we will get gas cylinders for cooking. No more stealing small twigs and facing the wrath of the forest chowkidar, no more haggling with other younger women to leave the shrubs nearer to the village for us older women who cannot walk far, no more spending long hours for daily wage and cooking the little foodgrains we buy from the sahuکار...and then, I got a rude shock."

-- These are words of an old Adivasi woman in Vidisha who can barely walk or stand on her feet.

Most of the forest has been destroyed by largescale illegal stone quarries. Ground water has depleted to such an extent that nothing seems to grow anymore, either in the forest or in their farms. Women spend back-breaking hours collecting random twigs and branches that barely meet their cooking needs. The LPG came as a blessing, albeit a short lived one. After the first round of free supply, the women were told they had to refill the cylinders on their own. Their meagre and erratic wages, especially since Covid, does not allow them to put in extra money for the gas and the high cost of transporting it to their villages.



The women have no other choice but to walk for long hours in search of firewood



In Panna, women face the crisis of depletion and eviction as they are not allowed to enter the tiger reserve. Those still living close to the forest complain that due to largescale diamond mining, much of the forest has been damaged including firewood species and ground water. Earlier, the women would collect several kinds of wood -- mahua, sagun, tendu, dhaab, chevla, chotaiyya, sejua, bargat, bahera, nukriya, neem, karonda, jharayya, gulchetash, talayya, and others. Today however, they find it difficult to find even a few of them. Of the 13 villages forcibly relocated, many have been pushed far away from the forest. The women's lives have been turned into hell as they have to walk for long hours in search of wage labour and even longer hours in search of firewood. A good majority of them are single women who lost their husbands to silicosis.

Findings of the survey:

	Chatra	Panna	Vidisha
No. of villages	10	8	3
ST Households	677	584	222
Households with LPG	75	131	154
Households where refilling done in 2021	Approx. 65 families refilled once every quarter	Approx. 21 ST families refilled 2-3 times in a year	Approx, 23 families refilled once in two months
Reasons for non-utilisation of LPG	Majority ST families did not receive LPG cylinders; they reported inability to afford refilling, ST families refilling LPG are employees who get monthly salaries; no transport facility to these remote areas and additional cost of transport is too high; some families expressed fear of using LPG due to lack of skills	Cannot afford to refill; do not have transport facility, too far from village; do not know how to use LPG stoves; firewood and cow dung available near the village free of cost; no proper road in protected area	Majority families are landless daily wage labour which is not regular, poverty and lack of money to purchase or refill; lack of transport and inability to bear transport cost; firewood crisis in this area due to extensive illegal mining, yet women spend long hours collecting firewood as they have poor income

Villages living closer to the forest have a new problem with plantations under CAMPA. Enclosed and fenced, these plantations prevent both local communities and animals from entering. Women are told they will be taken care of with solar cookers and gas cylinders. The small survey represents the status of poor tribal women who face the daily struggle of collecting firewood -- exposing them to threats of snake bites, leopards, forest guards and sexual abuse. The women are subjected to such dangers as they look to provide cooked food for their families, a primary necessity of human existence.

If the above can be called a footprint at all, then women's energy needs are to be included in the national energy policy to make it green and gender just. Current implementation practices of restoration or conservation merely tweak with women's energy needs where a few women receive stoves, cylinders, cookers or other devices. Cooking is a primary and universal need of every family, and every poor family suffers greatly from lack of access to affordable, safe and regular energy supply. In India, cooking is a gendered activity. In poor households, every woman and girl child spends many hours on collecting firewood in addition to cooking as a daily ritual, the burden of which is multiplying ironically due to current models of conservation and green solutions. From a women's rights lens, there is an urgent need to review our energy policies and climate action programmes.

The good news is that a national committee has been set up to promote women centric renewable policies. However, in reality, the committee is set up for a clientele of women entrepreneurs and industrialists in order to 'energize' the business of renewables. On the ground, the poor women's struggle for energy to feed their families is dissipated in the interests of extractive businesses. The primary business of cooking for survival remains unrepresented – be it LPG, solar or firewood.

Sacrificing Cows for the Tiger in a State with the Cow Cabinet

In Panna, women undertook an assessment of cattle losses due to wild animal attacks in the last one year in the tiger reserve affected villages of Kaimashan, Madaiyan, Bador and Umrahan. A survey conducted in five villages revealed a total loss of 21 cattle in Darera, 33 in Kaimasan, 9 in Umrahan, 18 in Bador, and 15 in Madaiyan. Livestock killed included cows, oxen, buffaloes, goats, hens and even dogs that were lifted by either leopards or tigers which come very close to the villages.

Women complained that they are losing out on a lot of income from sale of livestock and dairy products. The situation is worrying as many families survive on livestock rearing. Cattle dung as manure is now not having much of an effect, resulting in reduced crop yields. They report that only a few families received compensation from the forest department, and the amount is inadequate to purchase livestock again. Many other families who complained did not receive any response.

The community tries to drag the carcasses away, but most of them remain lying on the road as wild animals do not consume the cattle fully after killing them. However, this makes the wild animals return to the villages for more cattle kills.

The local tribal community fears that if they demand compensation from the forest department, they may be ordered to vacate their villages. The women especially feel inhibited to raise their voices, as they fear they will face repercussions and harassment when they go to collect firewood in the forest. People believe that increasing attacks on cattle is not only due to a rise in the wildlife population, but also due to biodiversity loss caused by extensive mining operations. The movement of wildlife has been restricted, and as a result, they cannot find prey easily. Women say it has become riskier to venture even near their village surroundings for firewood and grazing, as wild animals prowl closer to the villages these days. This has also led to children dropping out of high school and upper primary school as walking to school has become very dangerous. Of late, people are encountering tigers when they go for foraging of food or NTFP near the streams and ponds.

*The carcass of a
cow*



As water is depleting from the springs and streams in the forest due to largescale mining, wild animals have been coming closer to the talaabs (tanks) near the villages and attacking the grazing cattle. This distress is especially acute in summer. Although some attempts at providing water by tankers or pipes to the local communities and to wildlife are erratically visible from NMDC, these are barely adequate and do not sustainably restore water bodies for human or animal life to subsist. Further, the reservoir that NMDC was instructed to hand over to the PTR has only been done on paper, as reported by the Supreme Court Committee. Diversion of water for the mining operations and its township have contributed to water crisis for the local communities and for wildlife. Majority of the tribals who were evicted and forced to relocate have no source of livelihood and are forced to depend on illegal mine labour, with malnutrition and school-drop-out rates increasing among children.

Although local communities are eligible for compensation for the loss of cattle due to wild animal attacks, the lack of any response from the forest department seems deliberate in order to frustrate people's resolve in continuing to live in their villages. The recent central budget for tiger conservation appears to be much reduced, which implies that compensation for wildlife attacks would bear the brunt, with the situation forcing communities to 'voluntarily' shift out of the tiger reserve area.

Findings of the survey:

Village	Cattle Deaths	Compensation Received	Complaint Filed	Problems of Community
Kaimasa	13 Cows (3 tiger, 10 leopard); 10 Goats (leopard); 1 Ox (Leopard)	About 5 families received compensation between Rs 3,000 – 10,000. One widow got only Rs 800. 10 families did not receive any compensation	No response from FD to complaints by 3 families. Compensation so far received is only Rs 1000/animal.	Lost access to income and food security. Forced to buy dairy products even for household consumption; manure or fertilisers like DAP, Urea etc for agriculture; cow dung for cooking and tractors to plough the fields. Lack of proper grievance redressal mechanisms in the FD. Low compensation by the FD compared to the cost of each animal (Rs. 10,000-15,000). Travel expenses to the FD to get the compensation exceed the compensation offered.
Bador	17 Cows (7 Tiger, 10 Leopard); 14 Goats (Leopard); 2 Buffaloes (Tiger); 3 Oxen (Leopard)	2 families received compensation between (Rs.3,000 – 10,000). 15 families did not receive any compensation	7 families filed appeal for compensation; no response from FD	
Umraavan	6 Cows (2 Tiger, 4 Leopard); 3 Goats (Leopard); 1 Buffalo	2 families received compensation between Rs. 9,000 – 14,000. 3 families did not receive any compensation	No complaints filed	
Darera	8 Cows (3 Tiger, 5 Leopard); 13 Goats (Leopard); 1 Buffalo (Tiger)	6 families (Yadav community) received compensation between Rs 1,000 – 2,000 per animal. 5 families (Adivasi community) did not receive any compensation.	5 Adivasi families filed complaints; no response from the FD	
Madaiya	3 Cows (2 Tiger, 1 Leopard); 12 Goats (Leopard)	9 families did not receive any compensation	No complaints filed. Uninterested as the compensation is low	

Further, even the Cow Cabinet of M.P does not allocate any budget for either compensation or protection of the cows which are at high risk of tiger attacks, as their budgets are mainly for the 'rescue' of cows. The people wonder in sorrow about the motives for expanding the protected area that squeeze out the tribals from this eco-system, while allowing outsiders to set up shops in the name of tourism and tiger safaris. The NMDC is supposed to provide the net present value of monetary compensation to the PTR as instructed by the Supreme Court, in response to a complaint filed by the then Project Director of PTR on the illegal encroachment of the national park by the company. In addition, the company contributes to the DMFT funds and has also been instructed to contribute INR 6.7 crores to the PTR as a condition for extension of its lease period. Yet, the local communities do not appear to have benefited from any of these resources. A co-existence model of biodiversity conservation could be more effective in using tribal knowledge of the forest for wildlife protection and sustainable forest-based livelihoods.

Thus, tribals are left to devise their own rustic skills of tracking the tiger to protect themselves and their cattle as neither the cow cabinet nor the tiger authority is willing to rescue their cows. Community discussions gave insights on how the tribals have developed a sharp sense of smell, a whiff of tension in the air and in the birds and the flora, alertness to a pug mark on the ground or a scratch on the tree trunks... several such nature nudges to be wary of the tiger. Particularly, women seem to have developed such intuitions better, as we find that men are increasingly migrating and do not spend as much time in the land and their forest as women. Children have also adapted to these nudges and one sees them bounding fearlessly towards a nilgai or a wild-boar and learning to drive away these animals from their farms or villages. They explain how the barasingha (swamp deer) rubs its horns on the barks of trees, how the bears leave their marks on the branches, what tiger droppings smell like, or how the hoot of the birds signals the prowling of the wildcat. There is a co-existence and tacit boundary-setting that tribals and the tigers had devised for themselves, but this is being stretched beyond limits by the increasing density of wildlife and extractive operations that jeopardize not only human existence but other species as well. Therefore, on International Women's Day, the tribal women of Panna submitted their representations to the district collector appealing for compensation for their loss of cattle.



Fluorosis in coal mining area affecting children's health

Visits to mine sites in Saraitoli village of Tamnar block in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh, where SCCL's abandoned and operational coal mines are contaminating the water bodies, have revealed visible negative impacts on children's health. Most children and adults show deformities of bones and discolouration of teeth, which demonstrates traces of fluorides and heavy metals in the water. Women's experiential narrations and physical appearance of the water bodies indicate how local communities are forced to consume highly contaminated water.

Earlier protests from communities led to the installation of a water treatment plant that is currently inadequate to fulfil the basic drinking water needs of the surrounding villages. Having no choice, the women continue to collect this polluted water from the only available water body for all their bathing, washing and drinking water needs.

The central scheme of Jal Jeevan Mission which also receives funds from the DMFT, has been installing hand-pumps in the state as part of hundred per cent coverage of villages with respect to drinking water taps in hill areas. [Its statistical report for 2019](#) reveals that in many blocks of the state, the installed hand-pumps are dysfunctional, largely due to highly degraded ground water levels. For Raigarh, the figures indicate that out of 719 dysfunctional hand-pumps 638 cannot be restored for this reason. Local communities have complained to the Public Health Engineering department, which is responsible for installing the hand-pumps. However, the PHE expresses helplessness due to inability to tap ground water in these areas. Similarly, for Bemtara district, which has several mining leases like dolomite, quartzite and sand, of the 4471 installed hand-pumps, the report indicates that 1109 cannot be restored.



A child with severely damaged teeth



Local communities complain that intensive mining over a period of time has led to both depletion and contamination of ground water and the numerous springs in their villages. The expenditure on hand-pumps from DMF funds is superficial when no efforts are being made to reduce mining, rehabilitate the abandoned mines, or give back the forest lands to the people for community forest protection. The Jal Jeevan Mission is supported by a portal where local panchayats and individuals can submit their applications for water testing at their nearest laboratories for a list of parameters that these designated laboratories should provide information on. We urge communities and local groups to make use of this facility to verify the quality of your water, particularly in mining affected areas, at this portal for submitting your samples:

<https://neer.icmr.org.in/website/video.php#vid1>

*** (Attempts to use the water portal in Hospet from the JJM digital application for water testing, failed as the designated laboratories given in the portal did not accept the samples.)

No Caste Certificates, No Education for Children of Chatra

The negative impacts of mining have far-reaching consequences – they give rise to intergenerational challenges through the dismantling of social and geographical identities that have constitutional implications. The STs of Chatra district, Jharkhand, are internal refugees from within the state, displaced as a result of mining and construction of dams in neighbouring districts. Having migrated here, they received land as gifts from zamindars and the bhoodan movement, for which many have land certificates and tax receipts as evidence of their occupation for more than 50 years. The STs belong to Oraon, Munda, and other tribes. They depend on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods and some have even received pattas under the FRA (Forest Rights Act). However, the rich resources of the district have come under industrial expansion plans, including new mining and power projects and compensatory plantations.

The local communities report having received information about their lands being taken for creation of land banks -- a land pooling scheme intended to invite corporates for setting up industries. In this highly politicised context, the STs complain that recognition of their constitutional entitlement to reservations, caste and residential certificates has been denied to them with these processes being withheld for more than a decade now. This has had direct implications on the education and employment opportunities for ST children and youth who are not allowed to apply for caste certificates. Many reported that they had to apply for employment or higher education under the General category and not as STs. Non-processing of this has led to many ST students not being able to register for the Class X public exams online, forcing many to drop-out of school.

The current informal procedure being followed by schools is to accept a certificate from the Gram Panchayat for public examinations. However, without the validation from the block revenue office, these certificates do not hold good for any other purpose of employment or higher education.

Caste certificates from the Gram Panchayat cannot be used for employment/higher education



कार्यालय - मुखिया ग्राम पंचायत... सिद्धिद
जाति सत्यापन से संबंधित प्रमाण-पत्र

प्रमाणित किया जाता है कि ...

पिता ... ग्राम- संधारी

पोस्ट- चतरा थाना- चतरा

जिला- चतरा राज्य- झारखण्ड के

निवासी है, जो अनुसूचित जाति/अनुसूचित जनजाति/ पिछड़ी जाति/
अत्यंत पिछड़ी जाति श्रेणी के अंतर्गत ST (MUST) जाति में
आते हैं, जिसका सत्यापन मेरे द्वारा किया जाता है।

स्थान :- संधारी चतरा
दिनांक :- 22.11.2021

मुखिया 22/11/2021
ग्राम पंचायत... सिद्धिद

The state government has issued a notification (No.1754 under Section 13) for landless poor who have to be issued caste certificates. It prescribes a procedure for landless self-declaration by landless families which would be verified and certificates would be issued by the block revenue office. However, this is further complicated due to procedural faultlines like mandatory submission of land documents under the 1950 'Khatian' which the tribals find difficult to provide.

With the problem of non-recognition of land rights, the interlinked issue of caste certificates is causing grievous consequences for ST students. It is a violation of the RTE Act if ST children are unable to study due to non-issuing of caste certificates, making them lose their cultural identity and opportunities of reservations in education and employment. The aggrieved school children participated in the 8th March public meeting of the women where they voiced their difficulties in appearing for the Class X public examination.

Life after Covid for children in mining-affected areas

While schools remained closed for almost two years owing to the Covid pandemic, for Adivasi children in remote areas, poverty and lack of communication facilities meant that even the opportunity of learning online was inaccessible. With none of the kids attending school, this prolonged 'free' time pushed them into the more pressing survival responsibilities of their families.

A brief survey conducted by us in Panna and Vidisha reveals a disturbing picture. In Jhalar Kamaria, a village forcibly relocated for the PTR, 16 boys and 13 girls dropped out of middle school, while 6 boys and 3 girls discontinued high school. They are now mostly migrating for work as labourers to Delhi, Rajasthan and other states.

Findings of the survey:

	No. of villages	No. of households	Total no. of children		No. of school-going children		No. of children dropped-out	
			Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Vidisha	4	273	160	109	104	89	56	20
Panna	4	167	74	56	38	31	35	22

It was found that the common reason for the drop-outs was that relocation sites had no schools or transport facilities. Children do not have any identity cards for admission. Those living near the PTR find it very risky to walk through the forest as the number tigers and leopards has increased. Both displacement and silicosis have forced children to take over the responsibilities of wage labour.



Driven away from education, many children are now forced to take up other responsibilities like cooking



In Vidisha, girls find it extremely risky to walk through the mine sites to reach high schools as the presence of mining contractors, shops and traders make them feel physically unsafe. For the boys who are forced to enter the mine labour force early on, the quick money and addictions to gutka and alcohol at a very young age have diverted them away from academics. The poor infrastructure in schools and lack of basic amenities has hindered students from regular attendance. For example, the school in Lamaniya is in a dilapidated condition and unsafe for children. So teachers have no other option but to conduct classes in the open air with no class-rooms or toilets.

TESTIMONIES FROM WOMEN IN MINING AREAS

"BALCO which is operating in Semsata and Rabda villages has caused many long-term damages to women's lives. Our land was taken as we did not have proper parchi or patta and people had no information about the project. Mainly our agriculture and food systems were badly-affected as we used to cultivate kodo, kutki and other millets. Now we have to depend on daily wage labour. The remaining land is infertile as our water bodies are contaminated and affect our crops. A few families go for work in the mines but since the pandemic, mines were closed and there was no work. We were promised a lot of development facilities when the mines came, but many of us do not have either housing, electricity or water facilities even today. The water supplied by tankers is very uncertain and inadequate -- these stopped during the lockdown. Our children drop out after primary school as they have to go to Daldali for high school. We have no road or transport facilities, so both education and primary health have serious challenges. For women there are new risks as social life has changed and we do not feel secure going to the farms or to the forest. During Covid we did not have much to eat as there was no wage labour and we cannot cultivate our land and the forest has no mahua, tendu or other wild produce anymore."



Sunitha
(name changed)
- Kabirdham,
Chhattisgarh



Kamala
- Raigarh,
Chhattisgarh

"Our gram sabha rejected the proposed mine in our village and we did not give NOC. But we are facing challenges not only from mining but also from plantations. CAMPA plantations were forcibly set up even though we had filed our claims for FRA lands. People were angry that our own lands were taken without our permission and they pulled out the plants. We are facing many threats because of this. But our village is standing strong and we will not allow any plantations or mining in our forest. We are demanding for settlement of our forest rights."

Women in Panna rejuvenate water bodies

To kickstart the international women's day programmes, Adivasi women in Panna decided to take steps to demonstrate what transition to a sustainable future means to them in their local context. Not only did they submit their petitions for restoration, they themselves started restoring water bodies depleted by mines surrounding them. "The diamond mines have gone so deep that our ponds are dry and our fish have disappeared," Gonibai said, sitting at the embankment of the pond that was once perennially filled with spring water and was home to many kinds of fish and aquatic species.

The Adivasi women proposed their own nature-based solutions for the sustainability of the Panna habitat and Bundelkhand, which was once prosperous with the rich knowledge of water and biodiversity conservation that the Gonds practiced. On International Women's Day this year, Gond Women from four villages in Panna launched their own vision of climate protection and co-existence with wildlife. They started by mapping their water bodies, tiger tracks, agricultural lands and forestlands.

A sample of the Adivasi women's mapping of their surroundings



In the past, there were 4 springs (Ganga, Kunda, Ramsheela, Jhirni) and 6 talaabs (Masaan, Bhamur, Bengali, Bajrangi, Umar Jali, Patrohi) in just two villages of the Bador panchayat. Sadly, all of the above were badly damaged due to extensive diamond mining. In the entire panchayat, several such water bodies existed. Villagers recalled how they could find fishes and crabs like Bam, Sor, Golu, Khadia, Katol, Manjgura, Geeka, Jhinga, Mangoor, Chikni, and other aquatic species like turtles, frogs and insects in these waters. However, only two varieties of fish can be found here now, while species of prawns have completely disappeared.

Around these water bodies, their forest had badi bhilai, choti bhilai, udaar, kalseru, bakura, satuvan, chalari, bariori and other trees and medical plants. There were insects like Tiliya keede which were nature's water cleaning agents. Others like Makuval, bichi, and several ant species were also found in abundance.



*Women in Panna
have taken it upon
themselves to clean
their talaabs*



Further, their forest was rich in wild food like menar, keta, bidari, paank, gulchakor, mukhayya, angeeta, harra, behara, and trees like Karonda, Mahua, tendu, chironji, amla and many other berries and fruits that women regularly picked for food and medicines. The women complain that most of the above are not easy to find today.

In order to address their water crisis, the women got together to clean up their talaabs. They say it not only benefits them, but their cattle and wildlife too. They are collectively taking up soil conservation around the talaabs and planting local tree species in order to improve the ground water. This work should have been commissioned under the District Mineral Funds, but there is no public disclosure of these funds which ought to have also been linked to the MGNREGS works for restoring the water bodies, soil conservation or improving farming and forestry in these mining-affected villages. Hence, the women submitted a petition to the district collector for supporting their demands for restoration of their water bodies.

Making Up for Learning Losses – Dhaatri Initiates After-school Education Programme for Children in Mining and National Park Affected Villages

In the last one year, children in mining-affected villages suffered the most, as many were pushed to work in order to bring wages to their families. As a result, many children dropped out of school, while others lost interest in education.

To demonstrate a living example of how children's nutrition and education is a priority during the Covid crisis, the widows and youth from villages started their own Community Education Programme for school children.

The programmes include academic and cultural learning with supplementary nutrition prepared by the widows. The Youth came forward to take responsibility for evening classes, with creative and cultural activities fused into academic lessons.

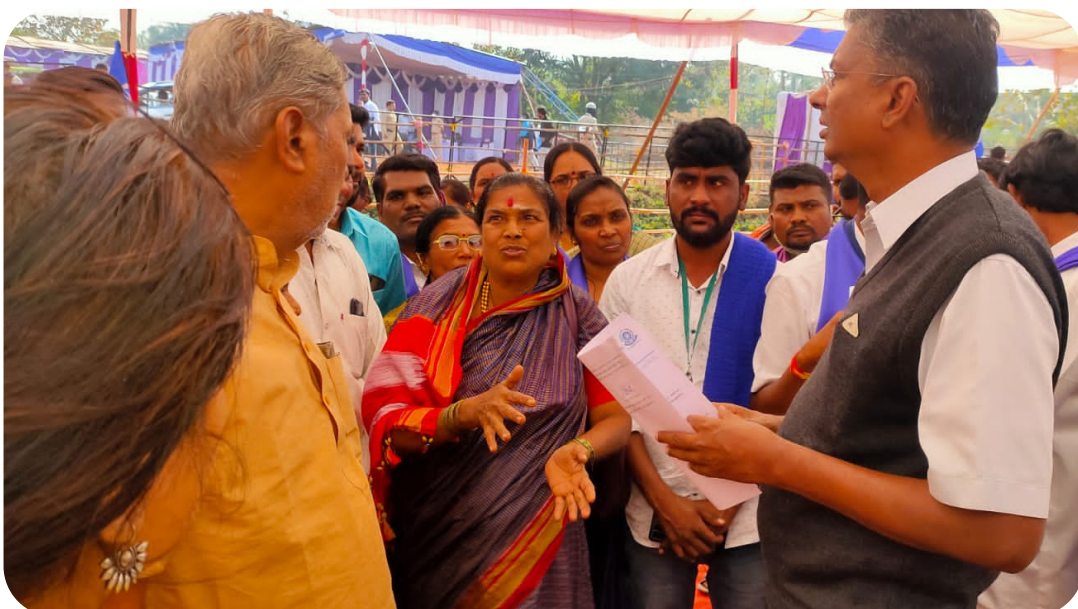
Children studying at an evening class



With the help of friends and volunteers, Dhaatri mobilized resources for school kits. With an overwhelming response from the children, adults are now complaining that their kids are not helping them out in Mahua picking. So now, children are learning their math fundamentals by counting and weighing their mahua pickings.

Devadasi Women Negotiate for Their Law

Determined Devadasi women in Hospet have given rise to a relentless lobbying platform pushing for a law protecting their rights. With a clear set of demands and recommendations outlining ways to prevent the cultural practice, the Devadasi women organized local consultations and met with local and state-level elected representatives to urge for the urgent passing and implementation of the law. The women also met district authorities and used the context of the international women's day for a month-long dialogue on basic entitlements and employment guarantee under the proposed Devadasi (Prohibition and Right to Rehabilitation) Act.



The Devadasi women met with elected representatives



Puncturing Patriarchy

Deep in the remote hills of Chhattisgarh's mining-affected Kabirdham district, an Adivasi woman heads her own vehicle repair shop. Along with her fight for the protection of land and forests from encroachment by bauxite mining companies, Radha simultaneously also works for a local NGO and runs her own vehicle repair shop. Amidst the incessant droning of trucks and heavy vehicles in the mining town, Radha has stood her own in a physical and occupational space only dominated by men. She has expertly learnt to attend to punctured tyres, damaged brakes and creaking vehicles. Radha's handling of the vehicle toolkit is as effortless as her farming and social mobilization work in the villages.

Radha working on a motorbike at her repair shop



This newsletter is primarily intended as an information platform for groups working on the ground to exchange news and stories from mining affected communities. We are currently bringing it out in English, Hindi and Kannada. We invite contributions from communities and local groups. We also encourage young and barefoot researchers to join us in compiling stories and data. You can send your photos and stories in any Indian languages.

Write to us at: dhaatriweb@gmail.com