

A Brief Report of the Fact Finding Team on Lower Suktel Project in the District of Bolangir

MEMBERS OF THE FACT FINDING TEAM.

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Back ground :-

Lower Suktel River is locally known as life line of Banalgir District. Entire Bolangir district is under scarcity of water since long. In the event the project functions & preservation of water, the decreasing ground water level will develop slowly and that people of Bolangir Town will get sufficient drinking water. There is no definite source that people of two blocks will get water to harvest single crop out of double crop in a year arising out of the said irrigation project. On the other hand peoples of 29 villages are going to lose their identity and will be displaced from their own land.

Facts & Circumstances:-

We started from Hotel Blue Lagoon, Bolangir and reached at Magurbeda i.e the spot wherein the spillway work is under progress on Gun Point in presence of police force and officials of revenue and irrigation department.

Visited 17 numbers of villages, met with leaders of Lower "Suktel Budi Anchal Sangram Parishad", Paschim Odisha Advasi Mahasangha, Lower Suktel Action committee, Senior Citizens forum, Advocates, leaders from political parties & representatives of print and Electronic Media, villagers, discussed and collected facts, data from persons opposing and supporting the project. Also interacted with persons who were involved during the process of survey and persons of repute. On the date our visit to disputed spot, there were about 5000 agitators present soughting slogans against government and construction of project.

It is learnt from a group of media persons that on 7th April near spill way construction site there were 10 platoons of police forces were deployed for starting the work on gun point. The media and local people were not made aware of such an incidence. From 8th April construction work started despite strong opposition.

It is found from the versions of the villagers that for the said project no such fixed R & R Policy has been declared, out of 29 villages, during last 13 years some of affected persons have been paid the compensatory amount without any authenticated approval. Initially the project cost was 217.13 Crores. The number of displaced families was actually 4160. However mafias and people belonging to other

areas has purchased land with an intention that they may get more money from govt. as compensation. The urbanized displaced persons number became 10600. It is also ascertained that not a single legal frame work was maintained by the administration for acquiring the land and for displacement and for payments. I.e to say that no clearance from Ministry of Tribal Affairs, No Environmental Clearance, The amount sanctioned by central govt was returned back. No Grama Sobha, no public hearing was done before initiation of project work. Forest right act is also not taken in to consideration.

It is revealed that the local people have demanded for construction of small check dams instead of a large dam, to which government did not listen.

That a joint team of members of District bar Association, Chamber of Commerce, Citizens Forum, Lower Suktel Action Committee called us to a another place for discussion where they threatened not to do any work for which it affect the progress of the project work, failing which we will not allow you to enter in the district.

We have seen in our own eyes that the deployed police personnel have crossed their limit and torturing the female agitators and scolding in unparliamentary words in presence of their officers. (I am sending the visual by courier today.)

Some peoples while sharing their personal views with us regarding **displacement** and too **police torture**. And they were saying, it was true that “if Suktel Dam will be build, then villagers will very soon lost their everything from all the index of their life. This will be the reason of migration, discrimination, increase the rate of drop out in education, family dis-organization, lost of psycho status, lost of health status, unemployment, like this.”So, all above problems will be happen due to **displacement**. With all above problems it is also true that all the villagers of this surrounding area, depend on the agriculture and forest product for their daily survive and that the local people treat the forest as their spiritual place.

Secondly, by the **police torture** women and children groups are suffering terribly exact like male groups. Police tortured them blindly which is fully illegal and too insult the human rights. If Police Department and dist. administration will break the laws then who will bring the peace in society. We met with women group and talked with them regarding the issues. They all were saying the same version that **“we may die, but we can not leave our land for Suktel Dam”**. Because, according to them “this area is a productive land area of Balangir and too forest product also available here. By which a family can survive their day to day life with a good livelihood.

Among the women **Mrs. Kumari Bariha** shared, that she was tortured very powerfully by police. When she was hospitalized on that time too police treated her very brutally. And broke the law. Dwellers are not only suffering physically but suffering mentally too. In this movement disable people are too suffering.

Some school students were also sharing their views that “they do not like this type of violence. If they will displace then they will lost their future”.

For collecting some other related information, we reached to dist. Jail Balangir and by the official permission met two inmates from displaced area of Lower Suktel Project. By name they are Mr.Arjun Mishra and another one is Mr.Pabitra Gadtia.

According to their views regarding running the Lower Suktel Project, “that construction of Dam through Lower Suktel Project is not a right decision of government as well as people of up areas of Balangir.

Because due to this construction very soon numbers of people from different villages of Bolangir will be displaced. Among them mainly 29 no. of villages will be affected.

Regarding **displacement issues**, they were saying that “This Movement was started before 10 years ago by rally, strike and organizing meeting in different level. But now the time from 8th April, 2013 to till the time it is running as a mass movement with instrument. Our Main motto of this movement is to stop the construction of Dam as well as to stop the Lower Suktel Project. Because due to this construction displacement will take place and we the villagers will suffer life long. If government can't grab this Lower Suktel Project soon, then may be Displacement will be a reason of migration, lost of psycho status, lost of socio-economic status, even education status too.

Secondly, regarding **police torture**, they were saying that “this type of torture is totally illegal. And in this matter collector too support the Police department.”

Due to torture of police all the villagers are suffering with mentally and physically. Women and children groups are too suffering severely. Even we both are also arrested by police with out reason. Due to **police torture** we lost our right of protection. They also said that during custody not a single person has taken any food from jail authority, after became ill they admitted in hospital. **Further it is learnt that a person died during protest out of sun stroke however officials did not allowed taking him in ambulance.**

It is pertinent to mention here that, the villagers who opposed construction of project, in their area, not a single welfare scheme was implemented I.e to say the proposed displaced persons were never given any benefit of any welfare schemes run by Govt.

Finally we opined that, It is a fact that Bolangir is a drought prone area and ranks in the state in starvation death & farmer suicide. Every year youths are migrating to other states in search of job. It is never advisable that for the benefit of urban areas, the villagers living in forest and remote area should sacrifice their lives. There is hundreds of proofs of violations of Human Rights & constitutional Rights of the villagers. CAG in their report mentioned that during distribution of compensatory amount before acquiring land for the project there is a corruption to a tune of Rupees one hundred crores. Nobody knows that no. of rain fall day in the area; nobody knows whether the project can fulfill its goal. We are eye witness of many irrigation projects which were completed since last two decades, those projects failed to fulfill the goal and that now Upper Indravati , Upper Kolab, Lower Indra irrigation projects are dried. Furthermore it is worthy to submit that the study and report of Ms. Anita Agnihotri also reflects that Lower suktel project is not a suitable project in the proposed area.

It is not a fact that in the event the lower suktel project becomes successful, the peoples of Bolangir, Tarava, Puintola and loisingha can irrigate their land covering 31,830 Hectors and 17.89 M.C.M Drinking water. And in lieu of that peoples of 29 villages covering 4160 persons will be displaced & 583 Hec. Of Forest land, 3955.55 Hec. Of private land and 786 Hec. Of Government land will be merged.

That number of false cases has been filed by the local police and hundreds of agitators were arrested and released on bail. It is unfortunate that the District Bar Association, Bolangir has resolved not to take-up cases of those persons belonging to other part of the state, who are opposing construction of project

HRLN Odisha is going to file two PILs relating to lower Suktel project soon after receiving the datas as sought by us under RTI Act.