In contrast to land grab

Village notes: Village Purnahdih, PO-Piperwah, Block Tandwa, Distt-Chattra. Village is located approximately 80Kilometers away from Hazaribagh bus stand of Jharkhand.

Families in Purnadih village are tribals known as Uraon and have been here for generations doing agricultural work. There are approximately 150 families and an overall population of 1000 people. Each family owns between 12 to 15 acres of land. More than ninety percent of people have their own land. They also collect forest produce as and when required for their food intake. They grow enough food to adequately feed themselves and their families. Land is fertile and farmers grow rice, wheat, wild seeds (tisi), mustard, lentils, and other crops. Within the village they grow vegetables.

Land entitlements are all in the names of the men. Women do not own any property.

The areas used to be dense forest, but deforestation began in 1987. In 1992, CCL (Central Coal Limited) began digging in the area and discovered coal. CCL is now trying to acquire more land. The village received notice to take monetary compensation and leave the area. The villagers don’t want to leave land – they will receive only a small house (reports varied on whether or not this is actually part of the offer) and money in return. Notice came about 8 months ago and they were informed the land had already been acquired and they should come and take their compensation. It seems land was acquired in the 1990s and the prices they are being offered are the prices at the time of acquisition, not current market prices. So far, no one has come to the village to evict them, but the village plans to resist if anyone comes as they have no wish to leave. The Village wasn’t given any notice or consulted before the land was officially acquired. Coal fields in the area have not been fully used, yet companies still try to evict villages to make room for future mines.

There have been already two demonstrations against the land acquisitions – one some months back against the blasting taking place near their village and one an year ago for stopping mining in the neighborhoods as it is polluting their water reserves. After that 26 youth of the village were booked under different sections of the criminal law (and implicated as criminals). They have not been charge sheeted yet, but this can happen at any time. They have formed a Village Struggle Committee within the village – Suresh Uraon is one of the members of that committee.
Most of the people living in this area are illiterate and also don’t have much exposure outside of the village.

The villagers want help – they want support from the people, want to know the laws, their rights, and how to fight for their land which they have inherited for generations. This is their livelihood and way of living. They state that they don’t need any PDS or any food support, just education for their children and some health services. They want to learn legal remedies.

Initially, mine companies used to employ local youth as guards and also using them to mobilize the local villagers in favour of the company to accept compensation and leave the place. Wherever these local guards are failing to do so they are removed with one pretext or the other, complaining not performing their duties well (e.g. stealing the diesel and other materials of the company) Companies now bring in their own guards. CISF security carries guns to frighten the local people.

**Challenges** faced by the communities are:

- Companies begin mining in the neighboring areas which are forest areas and slowly move to the populated ones. While they start digging, the ground water level goes down and also regular blasting cause’s cracks in the houses and noise really make their lives terrible. This results in villagers being forced to leave the place or make compromises.

- Villagers are not aware where to file their complaint as they are told that this order of land acquisition is from govt only.

- The resistance against land acquisition is not being covered by media or if there has been any coverage it is only negative stories against their struggle. For them it looks that these companies have connived with the media so that their plight can not be known to the common man who may come to their support.

- False criminal cases are filed against the local leaders by the police and in all court dates the victims are supposed to be physically present. This costs them money on the one hand time on the other, the whole day go in attending the court date.

- Though people are cultivating this land for a long time and producing agricultural products, the land is not being declared agriculture land, and only comes under forest area.

- Mining has also affected the life span of the local people; it has reduced now because the mining dust inhaled by the people causes diseases.

- Water pollution is another challenge faced by the people here.

- In most of the cases protesters are projected as naxalites (terrorists) or representatives of Missionaries and spreading the Christianity in the area.
Financial constrains of the activists, legal and other expenses are other major area of challenges. The village has only one demand: they should be allowed to remain on their land in peace.