

## **CAMPAIGN FOR SURVIVAL AND DIGNITY**

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### **Incidents of Land Grabbing in the Guise of Afforestation**

Afforestation programmes usually take place on forest land classified as “degraded forest”, or on revenue “wasteland” in case of compensatory afforestation. However, the Forest Department classifies all forest land that has less than a certain percentage of tree cover as degraded forest. Hence grasslands, village fallow lands, grazing areas, and lands that forest dwellers are cultivating (but do not have recorded rights on), but which are recorded as forest land, are all hence classified as degraded forest. Plantations on such lands have hence become a standard method by which the Forest Department establishes its control over them. Further, in case of “compensatory afforestation” - i.e. plantations meant to “compensate” forest destroyed for projects etc. - the Forest Department frequently takes over revenue lands and notifies them as protected or reserved forest, even though these lands too may be grazing areas, common lands etc.

After the passage of the Forest Rights Act 2006, the Forest Departments of many States have increased plantations on people's lands in order to block them from claiming rights. Most evictions after 2006 have been linked to plantations. Some examples:

- In June 2009, in the Ilendu area of **Khammam District, Andhra Pradesh**, 10,000 hectares of forest land were allocated for compensatory afforestation. The land included the community lands of the Konda Reddi adivasi community, who protested against this land allocation (which was made without consulting or even informing them).
- In July 2008, in Benyamaliguda hamlet, Ramagiri panchayat, Baipariguda Block, **Koraput District, Orissa**, the Forest Department undertook tree plantations on the lands of twelve adivasi families. When the families protested that this was in violation of the Forest Rights Act, the SDO ordered the Forest Department to halt their actions, but harassment continued.
- In July 2009, in Dholmandar Village, Turekela Block, **Bolangir District, Orissa**, the Forest Department undertook plantations on the lands of approximately 22 people.
- Similar plantations took place on people's lands in June and July 2009 in one other village in Titalagarh Block of **Bolangir District** and Nandapur Block of **Koraput District**.
- In several cases in **Rajnandgaon, Kanker**, and other districts of **Chhattisgarh** in 2008, forest dwellers were evicted from their lands in order to use the lands for plantations.
- In June, July and September 2008, at least 15 incidents of illegal forced tree plantations on people's lands were reported from the **Dangs District, Gujarat**.

#### *Environment Ministry Directs Takeover of Community Forests for Afforestation*

In connection with “compensatory afforestation” as required under the Forest (Conservation) Rules, which require that any diversion of forest land for non-forest use shall be “compensated” by planting of trees on twice the area (in case of planting in degraded forests), the Environment Ministry issued a directive<sup>1</sup> on 20.10.2003 to all State governments.

Para 8 of the directive stated that “zudpi jungle/chhote/bade jhar ka jungle/jungle-jhari land/civil-soyam lands ... shall be considered for the purpose of compensatory afforestation provided that such lands ... shall [then] be notified as reserved forests under the Indian Forest Act, 1927.”

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<sup>1</sup> Letter F.No.2-1/2003-FC dtd. 20.10.2003 from FC Division, MoEF, to all State governments.

All the four types of forest land named, i.e. chhote/bade jhar ka jungle, civil soyam lands and zudpi jungles, are community lands on which people in fact have recorded rights, but which were recorded as forests and brought under the Forest (Conservation) Act by a 1996 Supreme Court order. These are forests that people heavily depend on for minor forest produce, herbs, grazing areas etc. Under the 2006 Forest Rights Act, communities have rights to all these items as well as the right and power to manage such “community forest resources” (s. 3(1)(i)). The Forest Department, however, is now using compensatory afforestation to get these lands under its sole control. This directive is clear evidence of that, for it states that precisely such community lands should be used for compensatory afforestation and subsequently converted to reserved forests. This directive is in force till date.