

Short Introduction to the Aluminum Situation in India 2005

India's huge reserves of mineral deposits attract national and international companies. The southeastern state of Orissa has 57,5% of India's bauxite reserves. After the Indian government announced the new mineral policy in 1994, which opened mining to global giants, several mining multi-national companies have entered joint ventures with Indian companies.

Thousands of people mostly Adivasis were uprooted and displaced without proper resettlement and rehabilitation. The only people who profit from the mining are leaders of political parties, ministers, the police, administrative officials and company agents.

Only those people who have legal landownership documents will get rehabilitation and compensation. Without those documents the land is terra nullius, or nobody's land. The government can easily acquire those lands for public purpose.

Most tribals that live as illegal settlers practice shifting cultivation on lands which the forest department claims as theirs. People use the forest as their habitat, collecting basic needs from these common lands.

This lack of clarity about the rights of people, who live in these lands leads to displacement and impoverishment of communities living on the margins of subsistence. In many mining cases there have been instances where the clearance of forests were not approved by the ministry.

Regardless, either mining activities were started anyway, or the clearance occurred for a part of the project and people were evicted. As per the Samatha judgement, mining in the scheduled 5 areas (classified on the basis of its tribal population) should not be allowed without participation of its people. This means, that no mining lease would be granted to the private sector in these areas. Mining in the forests of poor people is only possible after it is ensured that the needs of economic growth would not impinge on the lives of the population, who have lived there for centuries and on the environment as well.

A lack of confidence in the regulatory system to protect the rights of poor people and the environment makes mining a murky business.

The portraits were developed in five paradigmatic situations, which cast a special light on the moral view of the bauxite mining.

