

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RESETTLEMENT AND REHABILITATION WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON PEOPLE DISPLACED AND AFFECTED BY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

South Asian consultation on GC35 in Jamshedpur in the month of October 2010 reminded us of the large scale internal migration for gainful employment and involuntary displacement due to the development projects. Mineral rich states like Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand in India are witnessing mass resistance to MNC led development that is escalating the displacement without proper rehabilitation. The Central Zonal consultation on GC 35 mandated the central zone of South Asian Conference to respond corporately to this phenomenon of displacement. Innovative alignment and advocacy action with the poor is the need of the hour.

One such initiative is the recent international conference organized by Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar, in Orissa, India on the burning topic of displacement and rehabilitation on 10th - 12th of April 2012. Twenty five Jesuits from the social sector participated in this conference. The organizers brought best academicians to interact and indeed push a new humane way of addressing the problems. Mexico, South Africa, France, Japan, China and host of other countries had representatives. One must appreciate the fact that such conference is taking place in an influential premier Jesuit business institute. Though the conference focused on the policies and practices regarding the resettlement and rehabilitation of the displaced persons, the immensity of the problem did affect the consciousness of all the participants. Jesuits did make mark by raising relevant questions; intervening in debates and voicing the concerns of the poor.

On the first day, at the end of the plenary session and dinner we Jesuits gathered separately and shared on our rationale of attending the conferences. Fr. Mike, the provincial of Jamshedpur, provided a definite direction to our participation. He reminded us that the conference should not remain a mere academic exercise but become beneficial to the poor and the displaced people. On the second day, Jesuits had an interactive session with Prof. Michael Cernia the main resource person of the conference. This session was indeed fruitful to impress upon him the need for alternative development models minimizing the displacement. His exhortation was to use the knowledge and experience on displacement as a science to bring about changes. This is an important invitation for us. His interaction with us brought about a change in his deliberation the next day. He reminded the audience of the immense suffering and impoverishment the displaced suffer. So the rehabilitation and resettlement must focus on the improvement of the displaced persons. The outcome of the conference was to start curriculum in the universities so that a scientific direction could be provided to the rehabilitation and resettlement.

On the last day, Jesuits gathered the fruits by having a good wonderful sharing among ourselves. The gathered Jesuits realized that if were to provide a corporate response our networking ought to be much more professional. Our advocacy efforts need to be given much more importance.

Institutions of higher learning will enable us to act professionally. Offering newer skills such as negotiation, legal training, pooling of the resources will go long way in preparing the poor to face the challenges of displacement.

Tony Dias pointed out that our presence was one of being a Contrasting Community in so far as we tried our best to be the voice of the poor in the midst of politically and socially powerful business community. Tony Dias' the JESA Coordinator from Bombay released his book "Development and its Human Cost" and of course books by Walter Fernandes were sold like hot cakes.

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