

# Workshop on Displacement, Resettlement and Right to Homestead Land in Kosi Region

## The Context

Floods and devastation has been a regular feature of the Kosi region in Bihar ever since embankments on the Kosi River were constructed five decades ago to tame its strong and turbulent currents, and ostensibly to provide flood protection to an estimated area of 2.1 lakh hectares between where the river enters Bihar from Nepal and where it joins the Ganga. According to the available information, there are around 380 villages with a population of 9.88 lakh trapped between the two embankments of the Kosi. They are spread over four districts (Supaul, Saharsa, Darbhanga and Madhubani) and 13 blocks (Basantpur, Kishanpur, Saraigarh-Bhaptiahi, Nirmali, Supaul, Navhatta, Mahishi, Simri Bakhtiyarpur, Salkhua, Kiratpur, Laukahi, Marauna, and Madhepur). The embankments have created a situation whereby these villages are flooded for four months annually. Silt deposits over the years have also raised the level of the river bed (land between the embankments), so that it is now 15 feet higher than the surrounding area. Although people have been witnessing adverse consequences ever since the embankments were built, the worst possible disaster struck when a breach in the embankments at Kusaha in Nepal in 2008 shifted the course of the river 120 kms eastward to its old course it had abandoned about 200 years ago. The deluge inundated vast areas in the districts of Supaul, Saharsa, Madhepura, Purnea, Araria and Katihar. Nearly 3 million people were displaced from their homes; more than 300,000 houses were destroyed; and at least 340,000 hectares of crops were damaged.



Regular floods and soil erosion has left scores of people in the Kosi region permanently displaced from their settlements. The initiatives taken by the government have been very lackluster, lacking vision and planning, and have not benefited the people in any significant manner. In the beginning of the Kosi Project, the affected people inside

the embankment area had been promised land outside the embankment. Many people were even given parcha/parwana for the same. But most of these people have not been able to settle on those lands due to various reasons. The resettlement sites allotted by the government were located around 8-10 km away from their original villages. It was, therefore, not practically feasible for the villagers to settle on these lands and carry out farming on land in their original villages. Another reason was that the resettlement sites which were adjacent to the embankments became perennially waterlogged and unfit for settlement. Most people who were given rehabilitation land outside the embankments are, therefore, back in their old villages within the embankments. On the other hand, thousands of those people who did not have any land in the original villages also can be found living on the river embankments or by the side of the roads for as long as 30 to 40 years. These households are, thus, not part of any village panchayats today, and, therefore, are unable to avail the benefits of Indira Awaas Yojna or of provisions of allotment of homestead land.



Keeping in view the situation described above, a workshop on 'Displacement, Resettlement and Right to Homestead Land in Kosi Region' was organised by Deshkal Society in collaboration with FES India on 6 September 2011 at Patna, Bihar.



## Objectives

- To create a space for dialogue on the issues and problems through articulation of the voices of the displaced and the key stakeholders
- Network building with community representatives, social activists, CSOs, development agencies and government institutions for realising the rights of the displaced
- To advocate for appropriate government policies and programmes for proper resettlement and right to homestead land for the displaced

## Key Participants

- The victims of displacement and landlessness
- Policy makers

- Social and political activists
- Representatives of civil society organizations and international development organizations

## The proceedings

The workshop was spread over the following three sessions covering various aspects of the issues and problems involved:

Session I: Displacement and Resettlement in Kosi Region: Nature and Magnitude of the Problem

Session II: Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation of People Affected by Regular Floods in the Kosi Region: Issues and Dimensions

Session III: Ensuring Right to Homestead Land in Kosi Region: Current Policies and Future Strategies

The key speakers and resource persons in the workshop were:

Dr. Pravin Sinha, Senior Advisor, Labour, FES, India

Prof. T. N. Jha, Economist

Shri Vijay Prakash, Principal Secretary, Planning & Development, Govt. of Bihar

Prof. D. M. Diwakar, Director, ANSISS, Patna

Dr. Manoj Jha, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Delhi, Delhi

Kapileshwar Ram, Dalit Adhikar Vikas Manch, Bihar

Madanji, Intellectual & Social activist, Patna

Ranjeev, Social Activist

Pradeep, Social Activist

Vijay Kumar, Social Activist

Daya Ram Yadav, Birpur, Madhubani

Naval Kishore Kumar, Journalist

Makkhan Lal Das, Madhepura

Lokendra, Social Worker

Prem Nath, Raghapur, Supaul