

16-8-2013

Dear Leo Saldanha:

Subject: Gender critique of Fact Finding report on Amrit Mahal Kaval lands

I read the Report of the Fact Finding Committee on the diversion of Amrit Mahal Kaval lands for various projects. In this note, I address if and whether gender issues have been adequately considered in that report. This is not an evaluation of the worthiness of the projects proposed.

A 2008 FAO study on the diversion of grazing lands concluded that “Gender inequalities are likely to become more marked, and women’s vulnerability to hunger exacerbated.”<sup>1</sup> The Fact Finding Report, however, does not recognize, examine or articulate how women and men are differently affected by the diversion of Kaval lands. In doing so, it ignores that women and girl children have to negotiate specific expectations, roles and vulnerabilities. For instance, when the report states that “There are chance of job opportunities both for unskilled and skilled labour would increase leading to an improvement in the livelihood of local populace”, (p. 18) it ignores that women who lose traditional livelihoods will have limited access to the new jobs, leading to further marginalization.

Based on Visthar's 25 years of experience working with Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women and girl children in Chitradurga, Bellary, Koppal, Raichur and Bagalkot, I want to highlight two specific concerns that the report glosses over or ignores altogether:

1. Census 2011 data shows that over 88% of households in Chitradurga depend on firewood as their primary source of fuel at home. Women are the primary collectors of firewood in the area. Common lands are the primary source of firewood, as forest cover is only 4.6% of the land area.<sup>2</sup> Diversion of common lands like the Kaval will increase the time women have to spend collecting firewood, infringing their Right to Leisure. There is extensive academic literature showing how the destruction of common grazing lands affect women adversely. As

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1 Yianna Lambrou, Andrea Rossi, "Gender and Equity Issues in Liquid Biofuels Production – Minimizing the Risks to Maximize the Opportunities", FAO 2008

2 Chitradurga District at a Glance 2011-12, Office of the District Statistical Officer

early as 1992, the noted scholar Bina Agarwal showed how women and girls are the most adversely affected in 6 aspects of their lives: time, income, nutrition, health, social-survival-networks and indigenous knowledge.<sup>3</sup> While the report itself glosses over those concerns, a careful reading of Annexure 17 shows that the women themselves are very aware and sensitive to this issue.

2. Diversion of the Kavals will adversely affect the traditional livelihoods of many women who have been rearing sheep, weaving blankets, weaving bamboo baskets, selling firewood, etc. Given the high rates of women's illiteracy, prevailing gender norms, and the market expectations, those women are unlikely to get employment in the few jobs generated by the project. When family incomes drop, there is a greater likelihood of girls and boys dropping out of school to work as child labourers, thus violating their Right to Education. Our experience in the five northern districts of Karnataka tells us that women become more dependent on men, face greater violence at home and a higher risk of being trafficked when they lose their livelihoods or their indebtedness increases. This is of special concern given that many women in Chellakare have accessed the Stree Shakthi program of the government to buy sheep; with grazing lands taken away, they would be unable to pay back their loans. The Fact Finding report is silent about this aspect altogether.

I hope that the judiciary and the decision-makers will be more sensitive to the gendered impact of these projects than this report has been.



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