Conflict Factsheet

Mining Conflict in the Niyamgiri Hills, India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Locality</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>2009 –ongoing</td>
<td>Biodiversity, Water, Forests</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Countries
India

Conflict Summary

Plans to mine the Niyamgiri Hills fostered conflicts between indigenous peoples in the eastern Indian state of Odisha and a large multinational mining corporation based in the UK. The local indigenous groups have successfully protested and forced India’s Supreme Court to stop all plans to mine the Niyamgiri.
Conceptual Model

Environmental Change
- Land Use Change
- Increased Land Scarcity

Social and Economic Drivers
- Economic Development
- Livelihood Insecurity

Intermediary Mechanisms
- Anti-State Grievances
- Grievances between Societal Groups

Fragility and Conflict Risks
- Context Factors

Context Factors
- Biodiversity, Water, Forests

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Conflict History

This conflict has been a well-known case in the mineral-rich state of Odisha in India, involving some of the world’s oldest surviving indigenous peoples. The Dongria tribe of Eastern India has been under intense pressure from the state government as well as Vedanta, a London based mining company, to make way for Bauxite mining.

The Dongria tribe and the Niyamgiri Hills

For many centuries, the highly endangered Dongria tribe have inhabited the hills that contain an estimated $2 billion worth of bauxite deposits (Bennett, 2014). The Dongria are a group of approximately 7000 people who have lived peacefully across the hills in small villages scouring the hill forests for food, growing crops and worshipping Niyam Raja, their Mountain God. Their cultural and spiritual identity is deeply tied to the Niyamgiri Hills; the Dongria believe these hills have been responsible for sustaining humanity by ensuring a system of thriving streams, forests and biodiversity. The Niyamgiri Hills are acknowledged in the Indian Wildlife Act for their natural beauty and rich wildlife (George, 2014).

Vedanta’s proposed project

Vedanta’s proposed project was to mine approximately 72 million tonnes of bauxite from these hills over more than two decades (Chaturvedi, 2014). This would have included blowing off the top of Niyam Raja, and disrupting the social, cultural and ecological fabric of the life the tribe has successfully preserved for a long time. Much before Vedanta received permission to mine, it invested several million dollars in setting up an alumina refinery downstream in the foothills of Niyamgiri that would be fed bauxite from the Niyamgiri Hills to produce high quality aluminium. The process of building this refinery has been fraught with multiple conflicts, including illegal encroachments on forest land, under-valued land acquisitions leading to forced resettlement of over a hundred tribal families (Wasley, 2009), unregulated pollution of land and water, and loss of traditional livelihood opportunities (Odisha Sun Times, 2014).

The Dongria tribe’s Response

The Dongria tribe has taken particular lessons from the experiences of neighbouring tribal communities impacted by the setting up of Vedanta’s refinery to raise unequivocal concern against the company’s plans to expand operations and mine their hills and forests. The Dongrias have protested locally and nationally against Vedanta’s mining license for more than a decade, including holding a number of public demonstrations, eventually forcing the Supreme Court of India to intervene. The court required 12 of the most impacted Dongria Kondh villages to vote their opinion and decide the fate of Vedanta’s mining proposal (Chaturvedi, 2014).

Resolution Efforts

In a landmark decision, all of the 12 village councils voted against Vedanta and denied the company any legitimacy to mine the Niyamgiri Hills. The Supreme Court’s decision to uphold the tribe’s denial to mining has allowed this conflict rooted in environmental and socio-cultural values to become an exemplar case (George, 2014) worldwide demonstrating an indigenous group’s fight against state government-led support to a mining company.
Aftermath of the Supreme Court’s decision
Following the Supreme Court’s decision, Vedanta’s plans to mine Niyamgiri hills for Bauxite have now been completely stalled and have cost the company up to $10 Billion (Chaturvedi, 2014). The scarcity of bauxite has also meant the refinery being shut down intermittently in the past, resulting in widespread economic losses for Vedanta. The communities of Lanjigarh, the area surrounding the refinery, have also been impacted by unstable employment and resulting loss of livelihood sources. With no bauxite mine of its own (Odisha Sun Times, 2014), Vedanta’s refinery plant has been operating at 25% of its current capacity over the past several months (Dehury, 2013). The company therefore, continues to actively engage with the state government to find new mines to ensure bauxite supply for its refinery.

With support from the state government, Vedanta is currently pursuing plans for a six-fold expansion of the Lanjigarh refinery, moving from the current 1 million ton per annum (MTPA) to six MTPA in the future (Dehury, 2013). Expansion plans and public meetings have so far met with strong protests, including some incidence of violence and widespread local opposition not only from the Dongria tribe of the Niyamgiri hills (George, 2014) but also local Lanjigarh residents and the Jharania Kondh (Helyar, 2009).

Future concerns
At the same time, there remain serious concerns over the future of the Dongria tribe in light of their proximity to the refinery downstream (the Dongris dwellings are located only 3.5 kilometers away from the refinery) (PTI, 2014). Additionally, the emergence of a new pro-industry central government in power in 2014 may bring other options for Vedanta. The company may decide to challenge the Court’s decision, hold community consultations with the Dongria tribe and the 12 village councils that voted against mining in 2013.

Outlook
The conflict is far from over yet. The threat of a mining invasion on the Niyamgiri remains with potentially serious consequences for the physical, spiritual and mental health of the Dongria community (Mazoomdaar, 2013). Vedanta’s past performance in addressing social and environmental impacts, as well as revenue mismanagement across their mining operations in other parts of Odisha (Odisha Sun Times, 2014), India (PTI, 2014) and overseas, particularly Zambia (Zambia Lii, 2011), does not instill confidence in the communities currently opposing its refinery expansion and bauxite mining plans in and around the Niyamgiri Hills.
### Intensities & Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTENSITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>International / Geopolitical Intensity</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Suffering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFLUENCES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Influences</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Influences</td>
<td>2</td>
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- **Violent Conflict**: Yes
- **Salience with nation**: National
- **Mass displacement**: None
- **Cross Border Mass Displacement**: No

### Resolution Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reduction in Violence</strong></td>
<td>Violence has ceded completely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reduction in geographical scope</strong></td>
<td>The geographical scope of the conflict has decreased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increased capacity to address grievance in the future</strong></td>
<td>The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grievance Resolution</strong></td>
<td>Grievances have been mostly addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity</strong></td>
<td>Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration

The Supreme Court of India intervened and required 12 of the impacted Dongria villages to vote for or against the company’s mining proposal. After the villages unanimously voted against the mining project, the Supreme Court upheld the landmark decision and Vedanta’s plans to mine the Niyamgiri Hills has been completely stalled.

Resources and Materials

References with URL

George (2014). Claiming Niyamgiri: the Dongria Kondh’s Struggle against Vedanta
Chaturvedi (2014). India Rejects Plan to Mine Bauxite in Niyamgiri Hills
Wasley (2009). UK companies linked to devastating Indian mine
Odisha Sun Times (2014). WIO for action against Vedanta for encroaching land in Odisha
Odisha Sun Times, (2014) Protest against Vedanta in Odisha capital
Dehury (2013). Capacity of Odisha refinery to increase to 2 MTPA in one year, says Vedanta chief
Helyar (2009): The Sanctity of Land
PTI, (2014). Activists protest at Vedanta’s AGM over alleged illegalities
Mazoomdaar (2013). Niyamgiri's Next Dilemma: Developing Kondh villages may change how tribals feel about their sacred hills

Further information