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# Seven years after relocation, Adivasi families left without access to basic amenities in Nilgiris

The families had paid a total of ₹32 lakh for around three acres of land which had been identified for them by land brokers and officials from the forest department

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ROHAN PREMKUMAR



Residents of Eachanakolly in Gudalur, a Paniya tribal settlement established around seven years ago, have been left without basic amenities since they were relocated from the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. | Photo Credit: ROHAN PREMKUMAR

The village of Eachanakolly in Gudalur, a

Paniya tribal settlement only around seven-years old is typical of the challenges faced by families relocated by the forest department from the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR). The Adivasi families, many of whom were allegedly cheated out of the compensation they received during relocation, were taken advantage of by real estate brokers and even some forest department officials. They were moved to lands which were under the control of the revenue department and lacking any documentation.

Because of this, the villagers continue to face tremendous challenges in procuring even the most basic facilities, including electricity and water connections.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, K. Maari, one of the 11 families living in Eachanakolly, less than a kilometer away from the boundary of the tiger reserve from where they were relocated from, said the families had paid a total of ₹32 lakh for around three acres of land which had been identified for them by land brokers and officials from the forest department.

“However, it was only after we parted with the money we were paid to be relocated and after we constructed our houses that we came to know that were ‘sold’ revenue lands. This in turn has meant that even basic services to the village such as water and electricity is denied to us,” said Mr. Maari. He alleged they were also not provided any documents proving ownership of the land.

Following complaints by around 21 families, the District Crime Branch police had registered a case against ten people, including a forest ranger, a forester a lawyer and real estate brokers for defrauding the families who were relocated from the tiger reserve a few years ago.

K. Mahendran, the district secretary of the Tamil Nadu Tribal People Association, said the problems faced by the residents of Eachanakolly are similar to more than 100 families that were relocated from the reserve, with poor housing, lack of land for cultivation and no basic amenities being the hallmark of the much vaunted “Golden handshake” agreement between the forest department and the Adivasis.

“This botched relocation of Adivasi families should serve as an example and a warning to all other communities in the state as to how these relocations are carried out, so they think twice about agreeing to such efforts,” he said.

Mr. Mahendran has approached the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with a complaint, asking for justice for the victims of the fraud. Due to his efforts, more than 80 families have been added as victims of the fraud since the original FIR was filed bringing the total number of victims now to more than 100.

Despite this, Mr. Mahendran says justice for the communities remains elusive, with no real

solutions available to the communities who have been resettled on revenue lands without pattas. “It is disgraceful that the original inhabitants of the region have been made landless by a combination of the actions of settlers and government policy,” he said.

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