

Report – Visit to Kandhamal and Gajapati districts

Visit Team Members

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Dates of Visit

- Jan. 25-Feb 3, 2010

Purposes of the visit

- To meet Baptist leaders in Orissa and check with the progress of the project
- To check the ongoing activities of the project (construction of church cum community halls)
- To assess for provision of roofing materials
- To assess the need for provision of drinking water facility

Background

The communal flare up aftermath of killing a Hindu sage by miscreants (*suspected to be Maoist rebels*) in August 2008 led to massive destruction houses, churches, public buildings belonging to Christians. About 57 people lost their lives in the violence perpetrated by fundamentalists and more than 30,000 Christians were displaced from their homes. As of today, the situation in the entire district of Kandhamal and violence affected areas elsewhere in Orissa is quiet and peaceful. Almost all of the displaced families have returned to their villages and the reconstruction of houses is continuing.

Narrative of the visit:

(1) Travels

On 25th Jan 2010, I started my journey to Orissa from Guwahati. I reached Brahmapur (Berhampur) on 26th Jan, 2010 at around 8:00 am. However, I could not proceed to Raikia; Kandhamal due to two-day 'strike' (shutdown) called by Naxalite¹ in this part of the country. The shutdown affected south and tribal dominated districts of Orissa. Kandhamal and Gajapati districts were also affected and no vehicles were available to go to Raikia/Gajapati. I reached Raikia on 27th at around noon time and took rest for the day.

(2) Field visits

In Kandhamal district, I could visit and see all 6 community halls cum churches constructed since October 2009. Besides I also visited 5 another affected villages for need assessment for provision of roofing materials. These visits were completed in two days. In Gajapati district I could visit 2 villages/places where constructions of community halls were in progress. The third village I visited was a new settlement at Kksurongo where 25 displaced families from former KK Singh village lived. The visit here in Gajapati was limited to few villages due to non availability of vehicles as all the taxi/vehicles for hire were off the roads because the drivers of taxi/vehicles were in non-cooperation mode with owners demanding increase in monthly pay (*the strike/shutdown was called by Taxi Drivers Association of Parlakhemundi town*).

¹ Ideologically, the Naxalites claim they are against India as she exists currently. They believe that Indians are still to acquire freedom from hunger and deprivation and that the rich classes -- landlords, industrialists, traders, etc -- control the means of production. Their final aim is the overthrow of the present system, hence they are targeting of politicians, police officers and men, forest contractors, etc.

(3) Progress of the community halls cum churches

- (i) **Dipaketa Church cum Community Hall:** The construction of this hall was completed with 1 ½ weeks in October 2009. This is small and backward village which is hardly accessible by vehicle except on peddle cycle because of the bad condition of the road which is under construction. There were about 20 Christian families (all Baptist) and they used to worship in a small house (hardly 15' X 15' size) made of mud, wood and straw roof which was destroyed during the violence. The size of this new hall is about 30' X 15' and it can accommodate at least 100-120 people while seated. The project contributed cement, GI sheets, bricks, nails/screws etc. The people themselves constructed this church and the project provided rice in lieu of their labour / time; since almost all of them were either wage earners or marginal farmers.



- (ii) **Madinatho Church cum Community Hall:** This village consist of about 56 families both belonging to Hindus and Christians. There were 16 Christian families belonging to Baptist denomination. The population was mostly the Kondho tribals. During the communal the small church was destroyed along with the houses of the Christians. However, almost all the broken houses were either reconstructed or repaired with the compensation money received from the Orissa government. Most of them received from Chief Minister's Relief Fund scheme to rebuild/reconstruct their homes. This church cum community hall was constructed with people's contribution of labour. This new community hall (35' X 15') can accommodate about 150 people. The project contributed cement, bricks, sand, G I Sheets while the people themselves constructed the hall contributing their labour and time. Considering, most of the people were either engaged in daily wage earnings or marginal famers engage in their fields- this community was completed in short time (about 2 weeks). The structure still requires finishing touch to walls; and fixing of doors and windows.



- (iii) **Rajenpanga Church:** Rajenpanga is about 20 km from Raikia in the district of Kandhamal. This village was affected during communal violence and some houses were destroyed completely or partially. The front side of this church building was completely torn down along with the roofing materials. The project provided bricks, cement, GI sheets and other materials to repair this church building. The laying of brick walls and other major construction was completed when this visit was done except plastering and painting of walls.



(4) Additional sites/villages for community halls cum Church & Ring wells

Below are the additional lists for construction of community halls cum church and ring wells.

- (i) **Sashimaha:** This village is about 12-15 km south-west of Raikia in Kandhamal district. The village with about 27 Christian families was attacked during communal violence in August 2008 and the church building was destroyed. Presently the villagers were worshipping in a makeshift made of tin roofing. Few houses were also attacked destroyed but have been rebuilt with the compensation provided by the government. The government provided compensation of Rs. 10,000 (US \$ 220) for the damaged church; which was meant for partial damage and this church was identified as partially damaged/destroyed



(ii) Sikonbadi:

In Sikonbadi, the total number of families were about 108; 21 being Christians and the rest Hindus. The people belong to Kondho tribal group. This village was about 20-22 km from Raikia and about 5-6 km from the main road. Presently, the village is accessible only either on bicycle or foot. The team had to walk about 1 hour through the hills and forests to reach this village. No vehicle can be possible due to breach of the road on a small stream, no proper roads, under construction roads etc. The team could meet about 20-25 people mostly women of this village and interacted with them about the needs and problems of the village. Since this congregation was not affiliated with any denomination no help came forth. However, they received compensation of Rs. 10, 000(US \$ 220) for the destroyed church building. This compensation amount was for those church buildings which were identified and verified as partially destroyed. But looking at the damaged structure do not seemed so. It was completely razed to the ground; only a section of the wall remains standing.



(iii) KKSurongo

This is a new settlement for about 25 displaced families of KKSingh near Parlakhemundi town (5-7 km), Gajapati district. KK Singh village was attacked and all the Christian families had to shift to a relief camp. They could not go back to KK Singh village since the tribals living nearby would not like them to return. Hence, these displaced families bought a piece of land (about an acre) at KK Surongo and moved in here in October 2009. Each family contributed about Rs. 15000/- for this plot of land. They have planned to settle down permanently here. On Sundays and other occasions they worshipped in a makeshift tent.



Activities during the visit

Date	Place of Visit	Purpose/s of visit	Activities
25/1/2010	To Guwahati	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airport and onward to Kolkata 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Took flight to Kolkata • Took train from Kolkata to Bhubaneswar, Orissa
26/1/2010	To Berhampur, Orissa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overnight stay in Berhampur due to shutdown called by rebels in Orissa; it affected places like Kandhamal and other Southern districts of Orissa
27/1/2010	To Raikia, Kandhamal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel by road on a taxi
28/1/2010	To Field/Affected areas-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To interact / Interview the beneficiaries of • To see the construction community halls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visited – Pirigodo, Madinatho, Depaketa, Dodibadi, Rajenpanga and Sareaju to see community cum churches • Interacted with Pastors, leaders and others of those villages
29/1/2010	To Field / Affected areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment for additional villages for ring wells / community halls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sashimaha and Sikonbadi
30/1/2010	To Field/Affected Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment for additional villages for ring wells / community halls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visited – Musumaha, Borepanga, Lotedi and Sikoketa, villages
31/1/2010	To Parlakhemundi, Gajapati	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel/Transit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel by bus from Raikia to Parlakhemundi, Gajapati • Check in to Hotel and stayed for the rest of the field visits
1/2/2010	To KKSurongo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment for additional villages for ring wells / community halls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could visit only this place which is near (about 5 km) to Parlakhemundi due to general strike by local cab drivers • Took a motor bike from one of the pastors and visited this place
2/2/2010	To Field & Affected places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To interact / Interview the beneficiaries of • To see the construction community halls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visited – Sano Tapongo and Bhagabanda villages where community hall were being constructed • Sano Tapongo village is about 50 km from Parlakhemundi but it takes about 3.5 hours to reach due to bad roads and stiff climb of the hills.

Report by
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