

# CAUGHT IN CROSSFIRE

Children and education  
in regions affected by civil strife



Save the Children®

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# Foreword

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Children are the most vulnerable group among populations living in regions affected by civil strife. In an environment of violence, children are vulnerable to fear, injuries, separation from family, abuse and other forms of exploitation.

In India, at least nine states have been identified by the government as having a high incidence of violence. The condition of children, the status of their education and child protection issues in these civil strife-affected regions have been overshadowed by the discourse on conflict and conflict-resolution.

There is a dearth of child centric reports from the ground, which makes most of us dependent on newspaper reports, these also by and large focus on attacks, blasts, encounters and curfew than on the issues of children's health, education and protection.

Save the Children works globally to protect children and their rights of survival, protection, development and participation. In India, Save the Children has a presence in fourteen states. Our new program strategy of 2012-2016 focuses on reaching out to five percent of the most marginalized children of the country. In keeping with this strategy, we decided to identify the vulnerability and needs of the children in areas affected by civil strife.

With this goal, Save the Children conceptualized and commissioned a report and a documentary film to make people aware about the issues and challenges faced by the children.

In 2008, the Planning Commission prepared a detailed report on the development challenges in the Left Wing Extremism affected areas, highlighting the developmental needs of these pockets in general. Moving ahead, Save the Children has taken the initiative to get down to ground zero to capture the real situation in some Schools and *Anganwadi* Centers, and to interact with children and people in general.

The prime objectives of the study are to make people aware and raise the voice on the challenges faced by children. Considering the existing challenges of access to some of these pockets and limited reliable secondary sources, the study explores critical aspects of education and lives of children in parts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha. These are amongst the states that are the most affected by civil strife in India. There is substantial evidence to assert that civil strife has affected lives of children adversely.

This report provides a glimpse of the situation in the worst-affected districts of the three states and focuses on efforts made by the government at policy and program level. In addition to secondary sources, the report is based on the narratives given by the parents, teachers, children and political – social workers. The documentary film 'Children in Crossfire' produced along with this report provides visual evidence of the situation in these areas.

Children in these areas face huge challenges with presence of armed police forces as well as the Maoists. They are suspected to be informers of either, or both group. Many schools demolished by the Maoists a few years ago have not been reconstructed, while several schools still remain occupied by para military forces hampering the normal functioning of schools. Languages spoken by the teachers and students often differ, which adversely impacts the teaching – learning process in the classroom. With vacant posts and high absenteeism of teachers, the teachers at work manage schools with meager resources.

I express my gratitude to Paranjay Guha Thakurta and Mohuya Chaudhuri, who agreed to be part of the team, and were the principle authors of this report.

I believe, the report is informative at various levels and will help bring the needs and concerns of children living in regions affected by civil strife to the forefront of policy discourse on this issue. I sincerely hope that through sustained advocacy by civil society and proactive steps of the government, children in these regions will realize their fundamental rights.

**Thomas Chandy**  
CEO, Save the Children

# Acknowledgments

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# Glossary of Terms

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**Adivasi:** Believed to have been coined in 1930s, the term loosely refers to various indigenous communities of India. Officially, it refers to Scheduled Tribes or Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs). Scheduled Tribes are tribes or tribal communities defined as such by Article 342 of the Constitution on the grounds of geographical isolation, backwardness in terms of technology, nature of economy and level of literacy and health, distinctive culture, language and religion and shyness of contact with other cultures and people. In this document, the term has been used interchangeably with 'tribal'. (Bakshi 2006)

**Anganwadi:** A Hindi word meaning 'courtyard shelter'. An *Anganwadi* Center (AWC) is the focal point for provision of a package of services - including supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up, referral services, pre-school non-formal education and nutrition & health education - under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme of Government of India. Launched in October 2, 1975, today, ICDS Scheme represents one of the world's largest and most unique programmes for early childhood development. It targets children in the age-group of 0-6 years. The *Anganwadi* is typically staffed with an *Anganwadi* Worker and a helper. In tribal-dominated areas / difficult areas, such as the ones this study deals with, the population norm is to set up 1 AWC for a cluster of 300-800 persons. (Source: Ministry of Women & Child Development, web: <http://wcd.nic.in>)

**Ashram Shala:** Refers to government-run residential schools in Chhattisgarh, opened under the Ashram Shala Yojna, a state government scheme started with 100% central funding. These schools cater to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students including those from Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) of primary, middle, secondary and senior secondary level hailing from remote and forest areas and aim to promote education in an environment conducive to learning. (Source: [www.india.gov.in](http://www.india.gov.in))

**Block:** Each district in India is further divided into sub-districts, which are known differently in different parts of the country (e.g., *tahsil*, *taluka*, *mandal*, revenue circle or Community Development (CD) block). A CD block is administered by a Block Development Officer (BDO) and covers several *gram panchayats* (local administrative unit at the village level). The jurisdiction is generally limited to rural parts of a district.

**Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF):** Formed in 1939, the CRPF initially existed as the Crown Representative's Police. It became the Central Reserve Police Force on enactment of the CRPF Act on December 28, 1949. With 207 battalions, CRPF is a large paramilitary force. It works under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Its primary role is to assist the states and Union Territories (UTs) in maintaining law and order and in managing anti-insurgency operations. (Source: <http://crpf.gov.in>)

**Gram Sabha:** *Gram Sabha* means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of *Panchayat* at the village level. A "*Panchayat*" is an institution of self-government constituted under Article 243B of the Constitution of India, for the rural areas (Source: <http://indiacode.nic.in>)

**Hawaldar:** A constable in Indian Police Force.

**Integrated Action Plan (IAP):** IAP was formulated as an additional central assistance scheme on 100% grant basis in November 2010 to address the development of “Left Wing Extremism” (LWE) affected districts. To begin with, IAP for 60 tribal and backward districts was to be implemented with a block grant of Rs.25 crore and Rs.30 crore per district during 2010-11 and 2011-12 respectively. For which the funds were to be placed at the disposal of the Committee headed by the District Collector and consisting of the Superintendent of Police of the district and the District Forest Officer. (Source: Press Information Bureau, web: <http://pib.nic.in>).

**Jan Adalat:** Also known as Kangaroo Court/People’s Court, it is an open public court held by Maoist groups, where decisions are taken on various issues and swift punishments are meted out. Government officials allege that these courts are actually held to gain public support, spread the Maoist propaganda, punish government informers and suspected infiltrators and to create panic among the people.

**Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya:** Schools established by the Government of India, to provide good quality modern education for the talented children predominantly from the rural areas, without regard to their family’s socio-economic condition. These schools, affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), operate under the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Human Resources Development. (Source: [www.navodaya.nic.in](http://www.navodaya.nic.in))

**Kendriya Vidyalaya:** Schools operating as Central Government schools affiliated with CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education). Its primary objective is to provide education to the children of Indian defense /Central Government personnel. An autonomous body known as the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan / Central School Organization looks after their functioning. The Sangathan administers a total of 1094 schools with 11, 21,012 students as in 2013. (<http://kvsangathan.nic.in/>)

**Mahua:** An Indian tropical tree found largely in the forests of the central and north Indian plains. It is a prominent tree in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat and Orissa. Its flowers are dried in the sun and used to produce liquor, popular among the tribals in tropical India.

**Maoism:** Refers to the political, social and economic theories advocated by the Chinese leader Mao Zedong. It is a doctrine to capture state power through a combination of armed insurgency, mass mobilization and strategic alliances. Propaganda and dis-information against the state institutions are also used as additional tools.

**Naxalism:** This refers to the radical communist movement, which emerged from a peasant uprising at Naxalbari in West Bengal. Naxalite is a term used to refer to various Maoist/Left Wing Extremist (LWE) groups operating in India under different banners.

**Panchayats:** The term stands for local self-government structures at the village, block and district levels in India. Panchayats were formed and strengthened as institutions of local self-governance in 1992 with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (Bakshi P.M., 2006).

**Porta Cabin / Portable Cabin:** Is a pre-fabricated makeshift structure used as a substitute for a school in Maoist-affected areas. These structures aim to provide school education in the areas where Maoists have destroyed schools used by paramilitary forces for anti-Maoist operations. Porta Cabins aim to offer both sleeping and living space for school children

at a low cost. Impressed with the performance of these schools in Bastar (Chhattisgarh), the central government has come up with a detailed plan under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*<sup>1</sup> to provide funds for such schools in Naxal-affected districts in other states. The states of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar are set to benefit from this plan. (Source: *Zee News*, Dec. 18, 2012, web: [www.zeenews.india.com](http://www.zeenews.india.com))

**Primary Health Centre (PHC):** In the three-tier public health system of India, the PHC is the second tier above the village level. It is the first contact point between the village community and the Medical Officer, since at the Sub-Centre level, only a health worker is present. For the tribal and hilly areas of India, many of which are strongholds of Maoists, the population norm is to set up 1 PHC per 20000 persons. As per minimum requirements, a PHC is to be manned by a Medical Officer supported by 14 paramedical and other staff. Under National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), there is a provision for two additional Staff Nurses at PHCs on contract basis. It acts as a referral unit for 6 Sub-Centres and has 4 - 6 beds for patients. The activities of PHC involve curative, preventive, promotive and Family Welfare Services. (Source: *NRHM*, web: <https://nrhm-mis.nic.in>)

**Red Corridor:** The term used to describe the stretch along the south-eastern coastline of India that witnesses considerable Maoist militant activity.

**Sangam:** Village-level Maoist association (Source: *Human Rights Watch*, web: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org))

**Salwa Judum:** The term literally means 'Peace March' or 'Purification Hunt' in Gondi language (South-Central Dravidian language). In the context of Maoism, it refers to a civil militia in Chhattisgarh formed to counter the Maoist violence in the region. The militia consisting of local tribal youth received support and training from the state government. On July 5, 2011, the Supreme Court of India declared the militia as illegal and unconstitutional.

**Tendu:** A species of flowering tree native to India and Sri Lanka. The leaves are wrapped around tobacco to create the popular Indian *beedi*, which vastly outsells the conventional cigarettes in India. Collection and sale of Tendu leaves is a major source of livelihood for the tribals.

**Verandah:** A roofed open gallery or porch.

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<sup>1</sup>A Government of India's flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE)

# Executive Summary

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This study primarily aims to understand how children living in areas of civil strife are denied their basic rights, especially the right to education and protection. For this study, eight districts affected by civil strife across the three states (**Chhattisgarh**: Dantewada, Bijapur, Bastar and Narayanpur, **Odisha**: Gajapati and Kandhamal and **Jharkhand**: Khunti and Lohardagga) were chosen to understand the landscape of violence and the state of basic services such as education and protection. This study has attempts to explore the impact of long-term violence on children's lives and learning.

The history of tribals in India is largely a history of marginalization, displacement impoverishment, neglect and systemic denial of rights. A majority of tribals, who constitute 8.08% of the country's population, have remained at the margins and subsisted on forest produce and agriculture over which they had customary rights and rights over the forest produce. However, with the onslaught of modernisation, these rights have been gradually and steadily usurped from them. This systemic denial and deprivation is exemplified by the fact that even though they reside in areas that have enormous mineral and forest reserves, they are yet to benefit from the natural wealth.

The systemic and historic discrimination and denial has provided a fertile ground for the rise of extremism and Maoism in these parts of the country. The gravity of the situation can be understood by the fact that the Government of India has classified 173 districts in nine states viz Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have been classified as 'Left Wing Extremism' (LWE) affected. This entire territory, stretching from Andhra Pradesh to the Nepal border termed – The Red Corridor- being marred by civil strife and violence. Though Maoism has taken strong roots in these areas, the main battle is between the Maoists and the security forces, with innocent civilians and children being caught in the crossfire.

Drawn unwittingly in this ongoing civil strife are children who have suffered immeasurably at the hands of both sides. There are many cases in which children have been recruited as 'Child Soldiers' by the Maoists and subject to interrogation, detention and humiliation by the security forces.

Against this backdrop of violence and conflict, the worst sufferers are children and their education. The ongoing situation has either led to destruction or closure of schools and often to occupation of schools by the security forces for setting up of check posts and security bases. This often leads to them being a target for Maoist attacks. Thus, schools, which should be a place of peace for children, have become places of fear.

## Methodology

The methodology of the study is geared towards understanding the experiences of people, impact of violence and challenges that children face, especially in the context of education and protection. The study primarily relies on qualitative methodology and uses a range of tools including semi-structured interviews, and case studies. Additionally, a literature review of reports, articles, journals and newspaper reports was undertaken to have a comprehensive understanding of the problem and the nature and dimension of conflict.

## Findings

Growing up in a hostile environment that is marred by everyday violence and insecurity, children live in a constant state of fear and lack basic rights to health, education and protection.

For children who are caught in this crossfire, the distinction between the enemy and non-enemy often gets blurred. For them, both the Maoist and the security forces represent danger, as on one hand there is the risk of being lured or coerced by the Maoist groups to join them as child soldiers, and on the other hand, they cower before security forces. There have been incidents where adolescent boys have been caught and beaten up by the 'men in uniform' on the pretext of being informers. These children are not given the chance to be heard and are branded from the start. This extreme voiceless-ness coupled with the denial of 'agency' has been one of the main reasons of their alienation.

The increased and visible presence of security forces to 'flush out' Maoist groups has turned the villages into ghettos and closed spaces, in effect severely curtailing the interaction within communities, villages and with the outside world. In the context of children, this ghettoisation has limited the physical space to play and grow and has also alienated them from the landscape and the wider world.

### ***Schools as Zones of Conflict***

The ongoing civil strife has had a severe impact on the educational scenario of these districts. Many schools have been destroyed, and some have been occupied by the security forces. For children and teachers therefore, schools have become a fearful and unsafe place. There is evidence of schools and areas in the vicinity of schools still being occupied/ encroached by security forces, especially in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Contrary to common belief, it was found that there has not been a single instance of schools being attacked by Maoists, except when these schools were being used by the security forces. Occupation of schools therefore has not only rendered children school-less but also made them a target for Maoist attacks.

### ***Poor Quality and Low Accessibility***

Even where schools do exist, they are marred by a plethora of issues including a shortage of teachers, limited or negligible facilities, lack of study materials and poor infrastructure. However, what is heartening is that education is seen as one of the main gateways to progress by the community in these areas.

Though the problem of shortage of teachers and teacher absenteeism is pervasive, it is more pronounced at the level of upper primary schools, and especially in subjects like Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences.

### ***Decontextualised learning and absence of flexible curriculum***

The language of teaching in itself is a huge barrier. More often than not, it was found that the medium of education was not the mother tongue- and that teachers were not familiar with the local language. This has proved to be a major hurdle in transacting education.

The pedagogy and curriculum that is being used to impart education is often devoid of context. It does not take into account that tribal' slives are rooted in a specific regional, cultural and ethnic context and that the process of learning is influenced by the immediate context.

### ***Lack of Security and Safety***

The history of violence and turmoil and an environment marked by lack of peace and security has resulted in a high dropout rate among school children. For children living in these areas, traversing through harsh terrain to attend school has always been difficult and been a cause of high dropout rate especially among girls. This has been further aggravated by threat of violence while going to school and lack of security within schools.

### ***Residential Schools and Porta cabins***

As a substitute to schools and to extend education in areas where schools have been destroyed, the Government has created pre-fabricated structures called Porta cabins. These structures are located far from the villages, generally at district headquarters; do not have adequate space and are crammed with children. Many families are extremely reluctant to send their children to these schools, especially after an incident of two children dying. Concerned with high dropout rates, the government in regions affected by civil strife has started residential schools, which have met with little success. A life away from home has led to enhanced feeling of alienation among children in these schools. There is also concern about the risk of abuse in these schools as there have been instances of children running away or getting trafficked.

### ***Lack of Psycho-Social Support***

Children suffering from trauma and living in civil strife affected regions have difficulty in comprehending and learning and need constant psycho-social support to reach their full potential. However, there is no mechanism or structure in place to offer such support or counseling to children,

### ***Social Problems***

There is growing concern and alarm among the tribals that the culture of violence and terror gaining ground in these areas is slowly damaging their social fabric. Rapes and murders that were unheard of among tribals have begun to occur, one reason is the sustained exposure to violence among youth.

## Recommendations

### ***Overarching Recommendations***

There are certain key requirements that need to be met for children living in civil strife affected regions. The section below underlines these requirements:

- Strict enforcement of existing national, international child protection norms and standards on the ground in civil strife affected regions of India.
- All children allegedly in conflict with law must be brought under the Juvenile Justice system and must not be dealt with by the adult criminal system, or put into prisons meant for adult convicts and under-trials.
- Strengthening the implementation of Juvenile Justice Act, the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS); Creation and strengthening of Juvenile Justice Boards, Child Welfare Committee and District Child Protection Units, (as mandated by the ICPS and JJ Act) for every district is important.
- Sensitization of security forces on the Juvenile Justice Act, UNCRC (especially on the involvement of children in armed conflict) and other national and international child protection standards and norms.

### ***Schools as Zones of Peace***

- Children living in areas of civil strife have been greatly affected by the ongoing violence around them. There is a need to build an understanding of the impact of violence on children's learning and education. The issues of violence and discrimination in schools must be addressed on a priority basis
- Creating an inclusive environment in schools where children learn without fear-advocating schools as "zone of peace"
- No school or areas in the immediate vicinity of schools should be occupied by security forces or the police. Demilitarisation of schools is essential in order to restore schools as a place of security and learning for children.

### ***Teachers***

- Special training of teachers and re-training of teachers is imperative so that they are able to address the special needs of children affected by violence, and also can improve their pedagogical practices.
- Teacher shortage must be addressed with adequate numbers of teachers in schools. The vacant positions should be filled on a priority basis. Efforts should be made to recruit and train local teachers.
- Teachers working in difficult terrains and conflict zones should be given special incentives and transport/mobility support.
- Counseling and moral support to teachers is also imperative since they need to guide children through this transition phase, from being out of school due to conflict, to merging into the mainstream.



## ***Safety and Well-being of Children***

- Children need to be safe within schools and en route to schools
- For secondary schooling, efforts should be made to either open schools within a radius of seven kilometers, or safe transportation should be provided to children.

## ***Children in Residential Schools***

- As far as possible, children should have the opportunity to study in their community or home.
- If institutional care is essential, it should be seen as a temporary solution. Under no circumstances should it take the form of living and studying in cramped and poorly maintained Porta cabins.
- In residential schools, there should be child protection mechanisms to protect children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.
- Strengthening the implementation of Juvenile Justice Act (JJ Act) and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) should be undertaken.

## ***Equity of Facilities***

- Instead of setting up temporary schools in Porta Cabins, the government needs to set up well-run residential schools such as *Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas* closer to the habitations (within a radius of ten kilometers ) up to grade XII for children in 12- to 18 years age group, who live in the interiors or have lost their parents in conflict.
- Comprehensive facilities for marginalised children, including quality education, healthcare and academic support classes should be ensured and child protection guidelines should be strictly in place to prevent abuse.

## ***Quality of Teaching, School Environment and Curriculum***

- The state governments should develop a policy for multilingual education, so that schooling begins in the local language.
- Inclusion of local culture, folklore and history in the curriculum can help in building confidence and make education more relevant.
- Music and dance is a vital part of tribal life, and activities such as storytelling, plays, and painting camps should be promoted.
- Similarly, sports such as football, archery and other popular local sports are extremely beneficial, therapeutic and attractive to children and should be promoted.
- Girls must especially be treated with dignity and their safety must be ensured. All facilities such as clean drinking water, well-maintained toilets, and adequate power supply must be made available in schools.



## ***Psycho Social Support and Counseling***

- Counseling of children who have suffered from trauma is extremely important. Schoolteachers and community members should play an important role to help children fight their fears.
- Counseling against violence and gun culture must be included in the school curriculum along with trauma mitigation for those who have survived acts of violence.

## ***Implementation of the Right to Education Act, 2009***

- The government should ensure that the Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE) be implemented in its true right and spirit and every child should receive quality education.
- In light of the harsh terrain and fear of potential violence, norms concerning distance and Pupil –Teacher Ratio should be reviewed.

## ***Engaging the Community***

- Formation of active School Management Committees for the well-being of all children in school.
- Creation of Children Groups in schools to raise awareness on issues of conflict and for establishment of a proper mechanism to raise concerns.

## ***Monitoring and Academic Support***

- Joint visits by government officials and civil society groups to schools.
- Senior administrative officials such as District Collectors need to set an example by carrying out frequent field visits and asking block officials to submit regular reports on the status of school.
- Regular social audits to monitor the functioning of schools.

## ***Child Soldiers***

- Both the Armed Groups (Maoist and the security forces), must refrain from using children as child soldiers, and active steps need to be taken to prevent recruitment of children into armed groups.
- All child soldiers must be demobilized and social reintegration of child soldiers should take place as per the Cape Town principles.
- As per the Security Council Resolution 1612 there is need to establish a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations of children's rights in civil strife areas

### ***Child Labourers***

- Concerted efforts should be taken to ensure that children don't get involved into child labour but go to school.
- Children should have access to social protection schemes as well as special training for their mainstreaming into schools as recommended by RtE Act, 2009.

### ***Orphaned Children***

- Efforts should be made to place the children with extended family members or under other forms of alternate care.
- Where placement of a child in an institution is inevitable or in the best interest of child, it is imperative that child protection safeguards within the institutions is in place to protect any child from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

# Chapter I: Introduction

## I.1 Revisiting the Red Corridor: The Context

***“The Maoist movement is a symbol of the divide between rural and urban India. The movement cannot be solved by police action alone. There could be a time when they (Maoists) could overrun urban citadels.” (M K Dhar, Former Intelligence Bureau Official)***

The journey from Delhi to the state capitals of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Jharkhand doesn't offer even a small hint of what lies ahead. The moment one is outside the city and moving towards the forest areas, tribal India becomes visible, beautiful, beckoning, but guarded by a wall of mystery.

Largely ignored by the state, majority of *tribals*, who constitute 8.2% of country's population<sup>2</sup>, have survived with the help of forest produce and farming. However, in many parts of India, even those rights have been snatched away from them. Even though they reside in regions where there is enormous mineral and forest reserves, they have never benefited from their own natural wealth.

There is growing feeling of discontentment and betrayal among the tribal people who believe rich industrial houses have extracted maximum profits under the guise of development. In the name of development these people have been evicted from their homes to enable dams, mines and power plants to come up (Walter 2008:1). A Report estimates that of the 60 million Displaced Persons (DP)/ Project Affected Persons (PAPs), 40 per cent are tribals, of whom only 25 per cent of those displaced have been rehabilitated<sup>3</sup>.

Union Minister of Rural Development, Mr. Jairam Ramesh at a meeting to discuss the rise of Maoism

stated that *‘at the moment, the democracy in India is facing an ideological challenge. The fact that tribal concerns is not central to political mobilization, as in the case of Dalit and Muslim mobilization, this has led to a serious discontentment among tribals’*

Unfortunately, over the years, this neglect and indifference on the part of the government, has only fed this resentment. It is this gap that the Maoist movement has tried to fill, promising tribal communities a better life and justice for all the wrongs committed by the system. For the first time, it seemed to them that their voices were being heard and their rights were being discussed, enabling Maoism to spread across the country.

Today, 173 districts in nine states viz Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal<sup>4</sup> have been classified by the Centre as Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected. This entire stretch of territory, from Andhra Pradesh to Nepal border, called the ‘Red Corridor’ cutting across all nine states (see *annexure 1*), has influential presence of armed guerilla groups. But the volatile ones where Maoist groups are most active in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha. Chhattisgarh continues to be the epicenter of the conflict, since it shares borders with all Maoist-affected states.

The Maoists believe that the state is interested in extracting minerals, forest resources and acquiring land rather than being concerned about the welfare of marginalized people and take it upon themselves to deliver justice and often conduct *Jan Adalats* (Navlakha: 2006, Karat: 2012, Dubey: 2013). Each development project in these pockets has unleashed a new war between the state and the Maoist groups.

Caught in the crossfire are tribal families, who inhabit this forestland, especially the children. Some

<sup>2</sup>As per Census 2001 data

<sup>3</sup>Source: B Mungekar, Member, Planning Commission, quoted in The Times of India, 26 March 2007, cited in Navlakha 2012: 2189

<sup>4</sup>Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, quoted in India Maoist Assessment (2013) of South Asia Terrorism Portal

of the respondents mentioned that to survive, there are two options - either migrate for work as menial labour to other parts of the country or get involved with Maoist groups as foot soldiers, who they believe will help them fight for their rights and also help them earn a livelihood. Majority of the people are highly disillusioned and have no faith in either the state or the Maoist groups. People along with children are struggling for alternatives and are looking for opportunities that will pull them out of this zone of terror and destitution.

The worst-affected states are Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand, which share their borders with each other and have their own guerilla groups. After operating in silos for two decades, the People's War Group<sup>5</sup>, and the Maoist Communist Centre of India<sup>6</sup>, merged to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in 2004<sup>7</sup>. The merger and splitting of these groups is a common trend among the LWE groups as observed by Dubey. Following a series of kidnappings, encounters and extortions, the groups from Odisha split from their Andhra counterparts. (Dubey: 2013).

Currently, there are several non-CPI (Maoist) groups in Jharkhand like Jharkhand People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI), Jai Jharkhand Tiger (JJT), Jharkhand Liberation Tiger (JLT), and the *Tritiya*

*Prastuti Committee* (TPC) who are at war with each other for territorial control. Internal clashes of these splinter groups and encounters with government security forces and the administration have led to the escalation of violence in the state. Once *Salwa Judum* began to operate in Bastar in 2005 (The Economic Times 17.12.2008), the Maoists also stepped up their attacks, but this time unfortunately civilians were targeted as well.

None of these splinter revolutionary groups seem to share any ideology or vision. While they boast of working for the people's rights, their primary objective seems to be to wield power and control the community. For instance, Jharkhand once was a stronghold of the CPI (Maoist), but now a dozen splinter groups like the TPC, JLT, JPC and JJT have emerged in the area. They are responsible for extortions, killings, and other unlawful activities, which affect the state's socio-economic growth (*The Times of India* 14.02.13).

But the major battle is between Maoist and government security forces. In the last decade alone (2002-2012), the war between Maoist groups and security forces seems to have intensified vastly. Between 2008 and 2012, after several interventions such as Operation Green Hunt, the numbers began to fluctuate as shown in the table below.

### State-wise Extent of Maoist Violence: 2008 to 2012

States	2008		2009		2010		2011		2012	
	Incidents	Deaths	Incidents	Deaths	Incidents	Deaths	Incidents	Deaths	Incidents	Deaths
AP	92	46	66	18	100	24	54	9	67	13
Bihar	164	73	232	72	307	97	316	63	166	44
Chhattisgarh	620	242	529	290	625	343	465	204	369	109
Jharkhand	484	207	742	208	501	157	517	182	479	162
MP	7	0	1	0	7	1	8	0	11	0
Maharashtra	68	22	154	93	94	45	109	54	134	41
Odisha	103	101	266	67	218	79	192	53	171	45
UP	4	0	8	2	6	1	1	0	1	0
WB	35	26	255	158	350	258	92	45	6	0
Others	14	4	5	0	5	0	6	1	8	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1591</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>2258</b>	<b>908</b>	<b>2213</b>	<b>1005</b>	<b>1760</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>1412</b>	<b>414</b>

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI 2012

<sup>5</sup>Having base in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha

<sup>6</sup>An organization working in Bihar, Jharkhand and Bengal

<sup>7</sup>South Asia Terrorism Portal [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data\\_sheets/maoist\\_datasheet.html](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/maoist_datasheet.html) (retrieved on 20 October 2013)

In 2008, 1591 incidents of Maoist violence were reported in which 490 civilians died. In 2009, these escalated to 2258, with 591 deaths. The following year in 2010, it dropped slightly to 2213 but the number of civilians killed went up to 720, the highest in this period. In 2011, with the re-configuration of ground strategy, the forces were able to bring the number of attacks to 1760. That year saw 469 deaths of civilians. In 2012, it fell further to 1412 instances of violence and 300 deaths were reported.

The scale of encounters with the police has remained almost the same during this period. In 2008, 271 attacks took place, while in 2009, it rose to 309. In 2010, 272 incidents were reported and since then clashes between the police forces and the Maoists have dropped to 223 in 2011 and 217 in 2012. Overall, there is a slight decrease in the Maoist activities across the states. Similar decreasing trends have also been noticed in district wise figures (All data: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2012).

These numbers are, however, deceptive. No matter what the strategy and the outcomes, the Maoist movement has shown no signs of slowing down in recent years. So much so, that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in a statement said that the biggest internal security threat that the country faced was Maoism<sup>8</sup>.

The core of the problem is the persistent denial of rights of tribals by the state. In the last couple of decades, while the nation has ostensibly progressed at a significant rate, the disparity between the tribals and the rest of the people has only widened. The government has failed to understand or hear the needs of tribal communities (Singh 2011).

The population of economically deprived tribals continues to be high. In 2004-05, 47.30 per cent of rural tribals lived below the poverty line as compared to 28.30 per cent of the general rural population – a gap of 19 percentage points.

Navlakha (2012) said, “When the central government speaks of Maoists obstructing development, such as in tribal areas, it means the Maoists’ presence obstructs corporate exploitation of minerals, forests,

water and land resources of tribals. Corporations come with capital intensive, low job creating investments, which necessitates import of skilled labour from outside and token employment for locals as members of an unskilled low wage labour force (Navlakha 2012:2189). In fact putting this in a conceptual perspective Karat (2012) observed that, “Under the contemporary deregulated neo-liberal policy framework, the exploitation and plunder of natural resources, including minerals, by domestic corporates and multinational mining companies has intensified” (Karat 2012).

Disregarding the concerns of the local population, the central government in partnership with the state governments signed several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with private corporations to begin massive mining and power projects in these pockets. Posco, Vedanta, Adani, Indiabulls, Jindal Steel and Power and GMR are some of the corporate houses in an otherwise long list. But their past experiences had taught the tribals a harsh lesson. The promise that thousands of jobs would be created was in fact not for them, but for outsiders. Having been stripped off their land and available livelihood opportunities, tribals have no means to sustain themselves. The government’s response was to initiate special measures like Operation Green Hunt<sup>9</sup> in November 2009, to wipe out the presence of Maoist groups from Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Special units were set up in the police and para-military forces and funds were pumped in by the government to penetrate and strike Maoist strongholds.

**Money Fueled in Maoist Affected States\*  
(2010-2011)**

S. No.	Selected Schemes	Money Spent
1	Special Infrastructure Scheme	130 Crores
2	Security Related Expenditure	299 Crores (145 Crores Advances, 154 Crores Reimbursement)
3	Integrated Action Plan (IAP)	2500 Crores
Total Expenditure**		2929 Crores

\*Source: MHA response to L.S.Q.NO. 1 FOR 22.11.2011<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>The Hindu, dated 24.05.2010

<sup>9</sup>The term said to be an invention of Indian media to describe the Indian Government’s paramilitary offensive against the Maoists (The Times of India, 6 November 2006)

<sup>10</sup>Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh raised the questions which were answered by Shrijitendra Singh, Minister of State (Ministry of Home affairs)

As mentioned above, the government is constantly pumping in a lot of money in the Maoist-affected regions. As the table given above shows, in 2010-11 alone the government has spent around Rs.2929 crore under different heads. However, a substantial part of it has gone into security-related expenditure, rather than much needed development expenditure for the people. It may be noted that other than this, money is now being invested by different Ministries under different schemes such as Backward Region Grant fund etc. According to another source, “the government will provide a standalone amount of Rs.1000 crore per year involving a total requirement of Rs.4000 crore for the period 2013-14 to 2015-17”<sup>11</sup>.

To tackle the violence in Maoist affected areas, as mentioned earlier, the state backed civil militia groups like *Salwa Judum* to take on the Maoist problem in Chhattisgarh. In a writ petition submitted to the Supreme Court in 2007, it was stated that the Chhattisgarh government was promoting the activities of *Salwa Judum*, an armed civilian vigilante group formed in 2005, thereby exacerbating the ongoing struggle and leading to widespread human rights violations<sup>12</sup>. Instead of resolving the issue, what it did was to destroy communities and their faith in the system. The villages were destroyed and families were hounded out of their homes and forced to live in camps. Those who stayed back were tagged as Maoists and brutalized by Judum members (Shah 2009). The living conditions within the camps were inhuman with insufficient food, drinking water and other facilities. Tribals, who depend heavily on forest produce for their livelihood, were not allowed to enter the forest to collect mahua, tendu or firewood. Children were driven out of schools since the buildings were taken over by security forces. Anganwadis were closed or demolished.

The death of innocent civilians in the crossfire and closure of schools are common incidents. Drawn into this brutal war, children in Maoist affected

areas have suffered immeasurably<sup>13</sup>. Children are recruited as child soldiers<sup>14</sup> by Maoist groups and they are interrogated, detained and humiliated by the government security forces (Human Rights Watch 2008)

The government’s stand of using force to control what is described as a “law and order” situation has had several repercussions, especially on children. Schools have been converted into check posts and security bases and armed personnel have driven out children from schools and covered it with barbed wires. These schools have then become targets of Maoist attacks thus destroying any further scope for these children to continue their education. For example, in 2007, when an Ashram Shala in Aranpur was occupied by the CRPF, the school buildings in the nearby villages of Potali, Nahari and Kakadi were attacked by the Maoists. Though new schools were set up at the highways, they remained inaccessible to the children from the villages (Sharma, 2011:13). Therefore in this backdrop of violence and conflict, children are the most vulnerable and have much to lose (Jana, 2008).

Responding to this, along with the banning of *Salwa Judum*, the Supreme Court directed the state to remove security forces from school premises. Though the security forces have moved out of the school premises in many areas, the education system is yet to be restored and children are still out of schools<sup>15</sup>.

It was observed that after *Salwa Judum* was banned, children who worked for them as foot soldiers were at risk. Hence, the government absorbed them in the police force and gave them a tag, Special Police Officer (SPO). But they (the children) continued to be the soft targets for the guerillas. Some have exited from the service, desperate to be away from the spectre of violence. For those who have stayed on, “it is the only livelihood they will ever have”, said a respondent tribal activist.

<sup>11</sup>Source: www.tehelka.com, date: 24 July, 2013

<sup>12</sup>Supreme Court Writ Petition filed by NandiniSundar 2007 available at <http://supremecourtindia.nic.in/outtoday/wc25007.pdf> retrieved on 5 November 2013

<sup>13</sup>For details, see Naxal Management Division, MHA ([http://mha.nic.in/uniquepage.asp?Id\\_Pk=540](http://mha.nic.in/uniquepage.asp?Id_Pk=540))

<sup>14</sup>UNICEF defines a ‘child soldier’ as any person below the age of 18 who has been coerced or recruited by a regular or irregular armed group in any capacity. This includes cooks and messengers.

<sup>15</sup>Source: The Hindustan Times, date 19.07.2010



In a nutshell, in the Maoist affected villages of Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh, the lives of children continue to be fraught with risks and uncertainty.

## I.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to examine the state of children and education in the conflict-affected regions of Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand in India, the nature and extent of violence experienced by the children and its impact on their lives.

Specific Objectives of the Study are:

- To document education-related experiences of children, teachers and community members living in regions affected by civil strife.
- To understand the state of schools and basic services needed to ensure education and well-being of the children
- To probe the abuse of children by state-sponsored agencies like *Salwa Judum* and Maoists by turning them into soldiers, spies and couriers
- To explore ways to intervene in order to protect childhood and ensure education in a non-threatening environment

### Key Research Questions

The study has gathered evidence on the following aspects of the state of children in regions affected by civil strife:

#### a. Scene of the conflict or locale

1. What is the state of children and their right to education and protection in regions affected by civil strife?
2. Who are the main actors in the regions affected by civil strife? Which are the various warring groups active in the area?
3. What is a scene of conflict?

*A sample 'villages/blocks' had been selected to understand how incidences of violence have affected the children and their education and well-being.*

#### b. Infrastructure

4. What is the state of school infrastructure such as building, boundary walls, toilets, drinking water, teaching learning materials etc.?
5. What is the extent of use of school premises by the government or the Maoists in the sample locale?
6. Is the curriculum catering to the need of the children in the civil strife affected regions?
7. Could improvement of physical infrastructure in terms of funding, facilities or building make a qualitative difference?

#### c. Risks

8. What are the factors that prevent students and teachers from attending school?
9. Do the sample schools implement the Midday Meal Scheme as per norms?
10. For how long do the schools function in a year?
11. Apart from fear, what are the other factors that stop children from going to school?
12. Is conflict a reason for poor quality of education?
13. What are the specific implications of conflict to girl children?

#### d. Initiatives

14. Are there any new initiatives from the community, government or the Maoists to resolve the crisis in regions affected by civil strife to ensure smooth functioning of the schools?
15. If not, what are the stumbling blocks and how can they be removed?

## I.3 Methodology

The study has used different tools of research to understand the impact of violence on children in the regions affected by civil strife in Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand in India.

**Primary research:** Sharply focused, qualitative study of selected eight districts across the three states (Chhattisgarh: Dantewada, Bijapur, Bastar and Narayanpur; Odisha: Gajapati and Kandhamal; and Jharkhand: Khunti and Lohardagga) affected by civil strife was conducted using qualitative tools of enquiry. Since the attempt is to explain the ground situation in Maoist-dominated regions, the study focuses primarily on case studies and observations. The study does not generate state/ district/ block/ *panchayat*-level data on schools. The data collected from the sample 'pockets' are only explanatory and not exhaustive.

**Literature review:** The study is based heavily on primary research. Available secondary data include reports of the government, UN, NGOs, newspapers, educational surveys and studies

in the education sector conducted by various university departments/centers in Education and Social Sciences. Scholarly articles/research studies conducted by individual researchers have been reviewed and referred to in relevant sections.

### Tools of research

Semi-structured interviews of teachers, community members and students have been used in the study. Observations/video recordings of some of these interviews have been considered. Data has also been collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) wherever possible. Narratives of victims of violence and abuse and case studies of children who are denied education have been recorded.

A case study of one school from each 'pocket' has been collected, to document aspects related to the availability and conditions of the physical infrastructure, facilities, teaching aids, mid-day meals, general health, well-being, recreational possibilities and children's articulation of various issues that impact their lives.

### Sample Size

States	Number of Districts	Number of Blocks	Number of Villages	In-depth Interviews (IDIs)	FGDs with Parents	FGDs with Children
Chhattisgarh	4	8	25	30	3	6
Odisha	2	5	18	20	4	5
Jharkhand	8	8	12	20	1	3

**Note:** The approximate size of a Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with parents was typically 9-15 and for children it was 15-20.



# Chapter 2: Getting into the Field

## 2.1 Rationale and Significance of the study

In India, children living in the zone affected by Maoism or the Red Corridor are among the most marginalized. They are voiceless, interrogated by security forces and Maoist splinter groups, often falling prey to child trafficking networks and child labor employers. Given this situation, the lives and learning of the children is adversely affected and the issue needs to be further explored and addressed at length.

The government has not been able to make much headway in strife-affected areas, in terms of

controlling violence or ensuring children's rights to life, health, education and livelihood. In fact, little is actually known about the conditions of the tribal people and children living in these conflict zones. Other than the newspaper reports on attacks and encounters, people don't seem to know much about the real state of the children and their education at the ground level.

It may be noted that most of the elementary schools in strife affected areas, especially the rural parts, are marked by dismal performance on most of the RtE indicators. In the table below, the DISE 2011-12 data shows the grim situation of key infrastructure indicators in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

**Facilities Available in Elementary Schools (in Percentages)**

Parameters	Chhattisgarh	Jharkhand	Odisha
Single-Teacher Schools	6.17	12.43	7.9
Schools having Boundary Wall	53.45	26.47	62.41
Schools having separate girls toilets	53.77	68.2	41.14
Schools Having Electricity Connection	25.59	10.29	21.8
Schools having Ramp for Children With Special Needs (CWSN)	40.17	36.56	46.23

Source: DISE 2011-12

Voices of the tribal people in the affected regions have never appeared in the mainstream discourse, except as numbers and as victims of a brutal war. This study is an attempt to explore the ground realities in the regions affected by civil strife, with special focus on education and issues concerning the well-being of children. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap about the communities who deal with violence on a daily basis. It also seeks to highlight the need for special steps to be taken, to ensure that children living there are safe and can access education equally.

Even though it is a challenge to assess and document the impact of armed conflict, such a study is very important to bring about positive changes in the lives of the tribal population living in this zone. Given that it is an evolving situation and the scale

and nature of combat fluctuates rapidly, mapping its impact and shaping development strategies to meet these unique demands is the only way children can get an opportunity to live the lives they are entitled to.

## 2.2 Scope and Approach

### Selection of districts

The scope of the problem is enormous. According to 2011 data, fourteen districts in Chhattisgarh, nineteen in Odisha and twenty-three in Jharkhand are affected. (Source: LWE Activities in Districts of India, Lok Sabha Q.No.1, dt. 22-11-2011). But the geographical outlay, treacherous terrain and poor accessibility make it hard to map all the affected districts. Based on the frequency and intensity

of incidents, districts were chosen from all the three states. In all, four districts of Chhattisgarh (Dantewada, Bijapur, Bastar and Narayanpur), two districts in Odisha (Gajapati and Kandhamal) and two districts in Jharkhand (Khunti and Lohardagga) were covered.

### **Selection of blocks**

Desk research was also done prior to the field visits to identify the worst affected blocks in the identified districts. The source of information for this part of research was the website of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

### **Selection of villages**

Given the climate of fear in which the tribal and non-tribal population lives, when an outsider comes to visit, the usual response is stone cold silence. This suspicion is primarily because of the lack of faith in the system or government machinery. Most tribals believe that the only visitors who land up at their doorsteps are those with a hidden agenda in their minds, who want something from them. Therefore, the selection of villages was based on the researchers' knowledge of the area and a strong network of local contacts, which had a pre-established relationship of trust with the community. Local contacts, including police officials, helped in overcoming the language barrier and to identify high risk villages where regular encounters have taken place.

Risk evaluation was also undertaken which helped in proper planning. Given the fact that there is very little data on the impact of conflict on children and their schooling, the report is a preliminary study -- an effort to map the ground situation in Maoist-affected zones. Once on the field, it was clear that if one relied on the administrative machinery, one would invariably get a biased report. Hence, most of the field visits were done spontaneously, after speaking to the community, who provided information about the worst-affected areas at the sub-district level. The idea was to construct the story from their perspectives rather than rely on secondary sources of information.

## **2.3 Journey into the Field**

The study was carried out in the months of October-December 2012. The visits were made in different phases to the three selected states. Most of the villages that were visited were located deep inside the forests where there is an active presence of Maoists and accessibility was extremely poor. In Chhattisgarh, 25 villages were visited, of which 3 were close to the towns. In Odisha, of 18 villages, only 2 were close to the highway; the rest were located in high risk areas where patrolling was going on. In Jharkhand, of the 12 villages, 2 were close to the district headquarters.

The ground work was done within a period of 10 days in the month of October 2012. Since the focus was on the community, open-ended interviews of children, parents, teachers, local influencers and leaders and child soldiers were carried out. Senior government and security officials, Left ideologues and Maoists were also interviewed. In addition, the researchers developed case studies of individuals who have experienced Maoist and state violence in their daily lives.

## **2.4 Challenges Faced in the Field**

It is unclear what lies beyond the visible. Making one's way inside the Maoist-affected areas is a nightmare. Villages close to the highway are not hard to reach but just a few kilometers away, the roads begin to disappear and one is caught in the middle of dense foliage, with no sense of direction.

Surrounded by hills, a majority of these blocks like Giddam and Behramgarh are thickly forested and villages are not situated in clusters of houses but spread out all over. Hence, moving from one to the other, reviewing schools and *Anganwadis* and speaking to the community can be taxing and at times fraught with danger. Any untoward question can unleash a great deal of anger. During the course of a conversation, Maoist informants usually interrogate the visitors about the purpose of the visit and, if not convinced, politely ask them to leave. In states like Jharkhand, members of the

armed cadre grill the visitors about their intentions. In 'active' districts like Kandhamal in Odisha, a single shot in the air is enough warning for one not to ask too many questions. In some parts of the affected region, villages are in the "liberated zones" and entry of unknown people is strictly restricted. Check posts have been set up by Maoists and only those cleared by them can enter. Once one does, the return depends on the cadre.

The conflict in this area has led to increased presence of security forces in the area, making travel and access difficult. Everyone is under the scanner, especially the media and all civil society organizations. Many have been branded as Maoist sympathizers and hounded out in states like Chhattisgarh, example being Himanshu Kumar, who ran a non-governmental organization (NGO) that worked for healthcare of tribals in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh. His ashram was burnt down and he had to leave. Kopa, a tribal activist, who protested against *Salwa Judum* and fought for creating better opportunities for tribal families, was also incarcerated in jail. So was Lingaram Kodopi, who was forced to join the *Salwa Judum*, left Chhattisgarh and came to Delhi to study journalism. Soni Sori, a school teacher, who was a target of the Maoists, was arrested and jailed.

Cars are stopped at every check point and clarifications must be given on why certain villages are being visited. Vehicles are not allowed beyond designated areas and the locals accompanying any field team are interrogated.

Caught between the Maoist and the government forces, families living in affected villages do not open up initially, especially in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Even if a local or an elected ward member is present, the community prefers to remain silent. To penetrate into the community, it required spending some time with them, after which many opened up and spoke about how they had been denied their rights and expressed their anguish at being caught in the tussle between the government and the Maoists. Women and children took much longer to open up and speak their minds because of they feared the repercussions. Contrary to these two states, in Odisha, villagers appeared far more vocal and less afraid.

In the midst of capturing the essence of the problem and sharing the frustrations of the community, the most wonderful moments that took away a lot of the negativity were the responses from the children themselves. Cutting across states, tribes, languages and age, almost all the children said one thing – that they wanted to go to school, that they wanted to study because that was their only way to have a better and safe future.

However, this exploratory study can only hint at the problem. For long-term measures, repeated evaluations would be required to be undertaken to capture the changing nuances of the problem.

## 2.5 Limitations of the Study

Since the study was conducted in the high-risk zones, the areas were carefully selected through purposive sampling. It was difficult to get secondary data which could have been helpful to triangulate with the information collected from the field and therefore during the field visits a lot of anecdotal information was recorded. This methodology can be challenged on the verifiability of the anecdotal information. It may also be pointed out that the problem of bias remains even if one relies on the community's account of events instead of that of the government.

But it may be worthwhile to keep in mind that the anecdotal information has been taken from individuals and the community members. Hence, in many parts, the administration has not played any role in verifying the authenticity of whatever has been said and recorded. The researchers had to depend on what they saw at the ground level and on the voices of the people. The government machinery denies everything. So the option is to either mention the people's comments or not to say anything at all. The entire effort of the report is to map the situation on the ground and articulate their concerns and voices, which seem to be currently absent from the public domain.

## Chapter 3: Status of Children in the Study States

This chapter gives a state-wise scenario on the state of children and education in the Maoist-affected areas.

### 3.1 Chhattisgarh

The state of Chhattisgarh has witnessed conflict for decades. According to the Government of India, 14 out of 27 districts of Chhattisgarh are affected by Left Wing Extremism. For the purpose of this study, four of the most affected districts by Maoists attacks were selected:

**Map of the State of Chhattisgarh** showing districts (Dantewada, Bijapur, Bastar and Narayanpur) visited for data collection and case story documentation



#### Disenfranchised by the State

Nand Kumar, is a farmer in Chhattisgarh, who has been living in a village on the border of Narayanpur and Bastar districts for the last 30 years, says that the alternative plan of the government to coerce the tribals to leave the jungles is even more insidious than backing groups like *Salwa Judum*. To get tribals to migrate, the government has denied every service needed to survive in the jungles. He says little children are forced to walk through dense forests to reach school. Primary Health Center (PHCs) have not been set up and the sick people have to be taken 22 km away in Lohandiguda town (Bastar district) for medical aid. He expresses that there are hardly any livelihood options available for the community and they don't have any sustained source of income, There are no local markets to sell their farm produce. The mainstay of tribals in the state continues to be plucking forest produce like *mahua* and *tendu*, apart from agriculture.

He further adds that both his children have dropped out of primary school and have no hopes of getting a decent job. His daughter wants to be a teacher but now the entire family wants him to marry her off. Nand Kumar says he and his family are tired of living insecure lives, full of fear, and want to leave for some safe place.

Even before the state was formed in the year 2000, Bastar, then a part of Madhya Pradesh, was an important base for the Maoist movement. Dantewada, Bijapur and Narayanpur also saw frequent clashes between government forces and Maoists (Times of India, 29th June 2012). One can hardly see any traces of development while traveling through the affected districts. During the field visit, it was found that in a large number of villages, especially in remote areas of Bastar, Narayanpur and even Bijapur, schools do not exist – not even as bare structures. Basic facilities like Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Anganwadis, roads, functional hand pumps, toilets or power supply are far-fetched for those residing in these districts. In some of the villages visited, where schools do exist, they are often a mere structure with one or two teachers attempting to run them with absolutely no teaching/ learning resources. According to local district level officials, development projects like roads and health centres are often stalled by Maoist groups. The fear of adverse events such as kidnappings or encounters keeps the administration away.

However based on evidence generated from the field, Maoists interference in such projects is strictly related to two issues. One, when schools are occupied by security forces and second, better roads connectivity as it helps to create easy access for security forces to carry out anti-Maoist operations.

Himanshu Kumar, an activist, who has rich experience of working with tribals, was driven out of the state for fighting for the rights of tribal people and raising his voice against police brutalities. According to him, the government considers the tribals a major impediment to the state's

### Absent administration

**Ratan Kumar** has been a farmer in Yerracoder village, near Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh for the last 20 years. He and his family of four have lived in this Maoist dominated area since childhood. He says this village has always been off the map for the government. His family has been able to live out of whatever they are able to earn through their agriculture work. He talks in favour of the Maoists, he says that though there have always been Maoists present in their area, but they have never caused any harm to the community. His neighbour, Tumku Marandi supports his contention and adds that the cadres have often helped them by extending healthcare support and timely medical aid to them. He says the Maoists have also been instrumental in promoting hygiene, sanitation and safe drinking water, which led to significant reduction in cases of diarrhea among the tribal population. The *Jan adalats* conducted by them help to settle disputes at the village level. Most importantly, he contends that the Maoist cadre also encouraged and supported children to go to school.

The Maoists had a good relationship with the community before the security forces moved into the area. Soon after the security forces set up their camps close to the village, the relationship between the Maoists and community no longer remained the same. The amicable and safe environment suddenly turned volatile and extremely unsafe for the locals. It became a battleground, where the Maoists needed to strengthen their army for survival. As a result, young boys and girls were picked.

The first attack by the Maoists was on the school building in 2009, where security forces used to meet and plan anti Maoist operations and then the Anganwadi Centre. Since then, no one has ever visited the village. "No collector, police or any other government official has come to this block." The community feels that if the government was actually sincere and wanted to really help them, then would have come forward to see their plight and take action to address their problems.

One of the respondents said "We live such insecure lives, at least there should be police force stationed here but nobody comes. Our daughters are forcibly picked up by the cadre and we are helpless. Where is the government? Where are the police? We do not exist for them."

He further adds that his 14-year-old son doesn't go to school, he is too afraid to step outside his village. The school building in Yerracoder was not restored after the attack in 2009. A month ago, when the cadre came to round up children for recruitment, he hid somewhere and was spared. The fear is etched on his face. His father wonders what future he could possibly have but does the government care?



economic development strategy and is therefore gradually moving the tribal population from their traditional habitats to towns and urban centres through coercive measures. This allows them to access the enormous mineral wealth in this area easily.

The formation of *Salwa Judum* in 2005 has further deepened the conflict and exclusion of tribals in the area. Supriya Sharma says “Though the motive behind the formation of *Salwa Judum* remains contentious, the arming of tribals by the state as counter force to the Maoists resulted into more deaths. The number of deaths had gone up from 83 in 2004 to 388 in 2006” (Sharma 2011).

This strategy has therefore worked towards displacing the tribals and also boosting up the Maoist movement. Despite the bloody war unleashed by the *Salwa Judum*, tribals went back to their villages. Post *Salwa Judum* in 2005-2006, there was a mass exodus of tribals because of the hostile environment and the fact that they had no home to live in. Villagers, who are attempting to rebuild their lives, say that they are still being victimized by the administration. As a result, the Maoists have garnered more sympathies after they launched counter-attacks and helped locals return home. Though they may have won back their homes, the community continues to pay a heavy price.

While visiting one of the sample villages, Rajesh, member of the *Panchayat* in Yerracoder village on the border of Narayanpur district informed the team that government officials had never come even once to review the conditions of the villages.

On speaking to the community and teachers, it came to light that the functional schools were never targeted by the Maoists and nor did they ever stop children or teachers to come to school. As reported by a teacher in Cherpal village in Dantewada district, the cadres would visit these schools to ensure teachers were coming regularly.

Despite its claims that efforts were being made to mitigate the impact of conflict on children, the

government actually seems to be perpetuating it by allowing security forces to operate from the school premises. In clear violation of the Supreme Court’s directive issued in 2011, that forces cannot be stationed in educational institutions.



#### **Military forces stationed on the main highway to Dantewada district<sup>16</sup>**

The research team observed that a primary school, on the main highway to Dantewada was occupied by both the Chhattisgarh Police and the CRPF personnel.

As shown in the picture above, a line of sandbags and barbed wire covered the periphery of the school indicating that in many places such as these, the ground situation has remained unchanged.

In this crossfire between the army and the Maoists, schools have inevitably become the battleground and education of children has been disrupted. A local respondent pointed out that the children are more scared of security forces than the Maoist activists. The dropout rates in these areas are reported to be extremely high<sup>17</sup> especially where schools are not close to the villages. If the school is away from home, students are afraid to travel the distance. This has affected girls more than boys as they are not permitted to go out of the village.

Since most upper primary/secondary schools are located at a considerable distance from their homes, girls drop out after primary schools and become more vulnerable to the armed groups from both the sides, which end up using them for various purposes. As reported by Human Right Watch (2008), children have been recruited and used by

<sup>16</sup> Source: photo taken by the research team in Nov 2012

<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to quote the exact secondary data because of inconsistency of maintaining the records at village levels in these pockets.

Maoists, government security forces as well as by *Salwa Judum* in Chhattisgarh. They are used to get the information, to make and plant landmines and sometimes even by the security forces, which is a major impeachment to rights of the child. Government forces use children as SPOs and deploy them in anti-Maoist operations, including armed encounters. *Salwa Judum* also engages children in its violent raids against local villages' (Human Right Watch 2008:21)

Confirming the trend of use of child soldiers, T J Longkumer, IG, Police, Bastar Range, says "it is easy for the Maoists to indoctrinate the children and turn them into child soldiers. A large proportion of fresh recruits today are girls because most of them are out of school". Another significant reason for this is that generally boys migrate to the cities for education and livelihood. Girls are recruited as they can cook and are often less demanding. Due to the unsafe environment, parents are unwilling to send their daughters outside the village to study, which makes them easy target for the cadre to recruit. Though the exact figures are not available, it is observed that the Maoist groups have a sizeable number of children in their party. In a number of encounters, children have lost their lives, even though they were not in the frontline or armed. They ended up being "collateral damage" of this vicious war.

After the initial elation of holding a gun, the adolescent boys and girls realized soon enough that they were caught in a cesspool of violence with no way out. After *Salwa Judum* was dismantled, these foot soldiers were left without any support. Some were inducted into the police force but many are still struggling for a livelihood. Having spent their entire childhood training to hold a gun, with no education, jobs are impossible to get.

Furthermore, the security forces are also said to have detained and tortured children suspected of being Maoists, recruited former Maoists to work as police informers and SPOs. And the government has failed to provide for the rescue and rehabilitation of children operating as child soldiers.

### The Child Soldier

Sunder Lal defied his family and joined the *Salwa Judum*. He doesn't remember the year clearly. As he lives in constant fear, his cognitive abilities are not optimal. He was only 13-years-old but like many young boys, he liked guns and the adrenaline rush that he experienced every morning when he went on his rounds with other *Judum* members. The thrill of riding jeeps and the power that he could exercise over his community was what kept him away from school. Despite his parents imploring him to study, he was convinced he would never go back. At that time, books seemed so useless. But after the civil militia group was disbanded in 2011, he along with many of his friends was given the option of getting inducted into the police force and designated Special Police Officer (SPO). He accepted this offer, and for some time, he felt powerful but when five of his friends were killed at Pamulavayi in an encounter, he was devastated. His life, defined by violence, was no longer attractive to him. Though he was with *Salwa Judum* for a very short time, he was made to make tea and do other such chores. Also, he realized it was no different since this job too was fraught with danger.

He felt his entire life had ended abruptly. He dropped out of school eight years ago and now without education, he is not fit for any job. Like him, there are scores of children who are victims of violence, who have no prospects.

### Lost Childhood

Child soldiers are not the only ones who are denied a childhood. In a majority of villages visited, children work in the fields during reaping and cropping season and carry fodder and forage of wood, fruit and other forest products. The younger ones look after their siblings since Anganwadis are not functional there. Parents feel that there isn't any obvious benefit of schooling and they believe that it is safer to work in the fields or to lend a helping hand at home rather than remaining unsupervised at school. Most villages in Bijapur and Dantewada of Chhattisgarh, in most villages, the community is the only support to provide education to the children.

Parents like Ganesh in Aerpun village in Dantewada's Gidam block says, would not send their children to school "The building was blown up in 2009 and never rebuilt. All classes are held under a tin shed. There is only one teacher to take care of 23 children, of which only seven are present.

Despite being so badly equipped, the school is still functional, this shows the keenness of the community to provide education to the children. There are no books or furniture and children sit on the floor or spend the entire day playing out in the open. Sometimes the teacher sends students to collect firewood from the forests behind the school premises. The school gets support from the locals and *Gram Sabha* members and is thus functional with all the limitations.

In addition the lack of a safe and protective environment for education, children are faced with various other risks like trafficking to cities to work as child labourers. Availability of credible data to support the high incidence of trafficking is unfortunately not found, however various discussion have brought to the fore that several children have gone missing and are untraceable till date.

Those children who lost their parents due to the ongoing conflict are extremely vulnerable, out of them many are not visible and no one even have an idea of their whereabouts. Villagers suggested that some of these children were taken by relatives or placed in shelters created by the local administration at Dornapal, which is about 83 km from the district headquarters in Dantewada. These shelters were initially set up to house tribal families evicted by the *Salwa Judum*. However, despite repeated enquiries no one could provide any concrete answers about the whereabouts of these children.

While other children who were orphaned due to the civil strife were mainly being taken care of by the community and many of the older siblings were taking care of their younger ones. The alternative to send children to the Ashram schools was also

### Schools away from Home

**Munna** was in grade I in 2010 when his parents sent him to an ashram school near Dantewada. Living deep in the jungles with no school close by, under the circumstances it was the best decision they could take to educate their son. They wanted their son to study well without any fear at the residential school, which also takes care of all his basic needs like food, uniforms and stay. However, in reality the situation was completely different.

Interaction with Munna's parents revealed that Muna could barely learn anything at school and was a victim of bullying and discrimination. The school teacher made him sweep the classroom and clean tables. He could not take this treatment any longer and one day he ran away from school and somehow found his way home. His experience in the Ashram school was so frightening that he doesn't want to go back again. He has also turned unusually quiet and is unwilling to speak. All he does is shake his head angrily when asked if he liked the school. His concerned parents say he no longer trusts them or confides in them. But one thing is certain, without education, Munna doesn't have a future. He, too, will end up working in someone else's fields, like his parents do. Though his father always wanted to give him a different life, but the system seems to have failed him.

available. However interactions with children suggested that though they did not have any problem staying in a residential school, but they felt alienated and would prefer to study at a school closer home and continue to stay in their villages.

In Behramgarh block, the research team visited a newly built higher secondary residential school which had around 100 students enrolled in it, but the space was grossly inadequate for such a large number of children. There were 50 boys and 50 girls, staying in two small rooms. The children had to help with cleaning and cooking since no staff was

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Families to send the female members with the Maoists, if there is no male member in the family. Those who refuse to give their kids for arms training face severe consequences (P:18). The report further notes that 'about 2,500 in the Left Wing Extremism affected areas are involved in conflict. This is excluding those who have become adult since their recruitment. All the insurgent groups irrespective of their ideology or origin and place of operation recruit children, not necessarily only for combat purposes.



appointed to undertake these tasks. A majority of children came from remote villages with the hope to get better education facilities, but to their disappointment the situation was contrary to what they expected. With just two permanent teachers, of which one was on a contractual roll, the students ended up lagging behind on their syllabus. While conversing with the children, it was apparent that very few of them knew how to read properly. The students themselves said that they had learnt alphabets but could not form complete sentences.

### Safety and Security

Safety is another critical concern for parents even in residential schools. In Behramgarh block in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, a police camp has been set up just across the road. Every activity at the Ashram school is monitored. A X<sup>th</sup> grade student, who had come from his village which is at a distance of 18 km away, was picked up by the cops on his way to the market. He stepped out of his school to buy a pen but he ended up being interrogated in police custody. The interrogation was done not just by the *havaladar* but other senior officers as well. Since his village falls in a Maoist-affected area, the police thought he was one of them. He still relives the trauma and says *“All I want is freedom from the overwhelming fear that engulfs me”*.



### Children walking through the dense forest area to go to school

In the interiors, schools are usually situated in the midst of forests. Children have to walk to long stretches through the dense forests to reach their school. A sense of fear and insecurity prevails

because there is always a chance of getting caught in the crossfire between security forces and the Maoists. In many cases, students are extremely vulnerable as their schools have no boundary walls or any other safety apparatus in the schools premise. Since classes are erratic, they often sneak away to play outside with friends and that in still fear and worry among parents. Many of the parents shared their concerns saying that it is high time that the schools create safe and secured infrastructure for children. The schools with no further delays should build proper boundary walls and gates<sup>19</sup> so that the children are guarded. Systemic changes is something that they highly recommend, teachers should take the responsibility and ownership to provide quality education, have better monitoring mechanism, be disciplined and engage them with interesting activities so that the children remain inside the school premises and not stray off.

A significant number of children that were interviewed during the study showed signs of cognitive impairment, perhaps due to the conditions they live in. There is therefore an urgent need to map the impact of violence on the development of personalities of children. Many children are unable to pick up information and process it at a normal pace. In Chhattisgarh, at a primary school near Lohandiguda in Bastar district, Ramesh, the only school teacher, is attempting to resolve this problem through sports. According to him, children enjoy coming to school but take time to understand what is being taught. He found to his surprise that when encouraged to play football every day, students began to respond better. They showed greater interest in studying and asked questions as opposed to remaining silent during classes. Evidence shows that there is a direct link between sports and improving learning abilities.

Under constant criticism for failing to address the developmental issues in Maoist-affected districts, the Central government has put in place the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) to provide additional funding for 60 Maoist-affected districts in November 2010. Between 2010-11 and 2011-12, a block grant

<sup>19</sup> Boundary walls and gates of a school are usually not targeted by the Maoists, unless the school is under the occupation of security forces. Hence, there is no reason why these expectations of the parents should not be respected by the government.

of Rs.25 crore and a district grant of Rs.30 crore were allocated to implement development projects.

An attempt was also made to restore public confidence in the government. In Chhattisgarh, the point of entry was school education. However, the only concrete outcome that resulted from this Integrated Action Plan (IAP) enterprise is a beehive of schools that have mushroomed in Dantewada and some parts of Bijapur. A majority of them are close to the main highway. The interiors remain ignored and invisible. Instead, children living in these parts are being shepherded to Porta Cabins near the district headquarters. These shed-like structures are few and therefore crammed with children.

But after two children died in two adjoining Porta cabins in Bastar district, parents and local tribal activists<sup>20</sup> who work within the community and fight for tribal rights raised questions about the quality of care being provided at these school-cum-shelters and are contemplating on bringing their children back home.

Parents said that they would certainly prefer if the village schools were strengthened. Even the newly refurbished school buildings have not attracted too many children since they are bereft of the required facilities needed to ensure good education and childhood care.

Madhuri Uike, a primary school teacher in Gidam block in the district of Chhattisgarh says, there is an acute shortage of teachers and a majority of them who have been hired are on contract. Most of them are not trained enough to teach subjects like science and mathematics at the secondary level. Though most of the schools were upgraded to the secondary level, the infrastructure problem continues to prevail, majority of these schools do not have basic facilities like drinking water, power supply, furniture or adequate and skilled staff.

The District Collector of Dantewada in Chhattisgarh, Om Prakash Choudhary, says his priority is to provide education to all and get every child into a school. He stated that putting up the Portacabins as residential schools and rebuilding damaged

school buildings is part of the plan to revive the education system. He says that enrolment has increased significantly and schools are spilling over. Although he agrees that there is a huge demand for education among the tribal community, but the issues of acute staff shortage, poor quality of teaching, inadequate and poor infrastructure at the primary and secondary levels and language barriers have not been addressed so far.

Choudhary is making efforts to overcome these limitations and has started special coaching classes for tribal children, to help them cover any backlog or to gain conceptual clarity in their courses. This is followed by an examination and those who score good grades are admitted into Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, which provides education and accommodation from grade VI to grade XII. These are equipped with comparatively better facilities and resources provided by the Central government.

But this initiative seems to be insufficient as it has a very limited reach. A breakup of the students in his school reveals that only a miniscule number of tribal children study here. Most of the students belong to well-off families and are non-tribals.

At the moment, the administration is thinking big and focusing on making Chhattisgarh an educational hub. In Dantewada, the District Collector, Om Prakash Choudhary, said that he was setting up a Rs.100 crore mega education city on 170 acres of tribal land. The education hub will offer engineering and other professional training courses. The locals gave up their lands, hoping that it will result in a positive change for their benefit and that their children will have a promising future. It is important that this positive change materializes, otherwise it can also backfire. Non-fulfillment of the promise is fraught with the risk of losing out on the trust of the tribals, escalating their discontentment and further alienation.

To create better opportunities for the youths and to enhance their skills, a skill development college (Skill Mahavidalaya) has also been set up inside this education cluster. But most tribals feel that only the non-tribals will benefit from these measures.

<sup>20</sup> The study team interviewed a number of activists working independently. These are not affiliated with any NGO.

Though these are progressive measures, but there is a high probability that these initiatives could further alienate the tribals. Primarily for the very reason, when access to basic education itself is a big question, a tribal girl or a boy can rarely aspire to get admission at the institutions set up for higher education. Many parents said that it is very clear that under the guise of 'mainstreaming' the tribals, the government is actually dispossessing them. Instead of listening to what their needs are, the administration is only imposing their own ideas and plans on the tribals simply because they have no choice and cannot protest against these inappropriate decisions.

In village after village, parents, community leaders and *panchayat* members reiterated the need to set up quality schools like the *Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya* close to their villages so that children can get quality education right at their doorstep.

What comes most strongly is that fact that education is the fundamental right which will allow children living in regions affected by civil strife to break out of the vicious cycle of violence and transform their lives. This requires collective action and a shared responsibility to ensure a safe, protective and violence free society to all the children and save them from the brutality of conflict.

### Transforming Lives

**Sukalu** is 11 years old. His parents died a few years back, leaving Sukalu and his brother alone. The two brother struggled to pull their lives together. Sukalu was bright and was admitted for special coaching classes. He topped the batch and is now at the *Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya* in Gidam. His elder brother, Rakesh (16), is also in a secondary school in Dantewada. They have none back home in Kirandul village, 70 kilometers away from Dantewada. It is a Maoist-affected area but Sukalu says children don't have a problem. Access is the real challenge as well as the uncertainty that surrounds their lives.

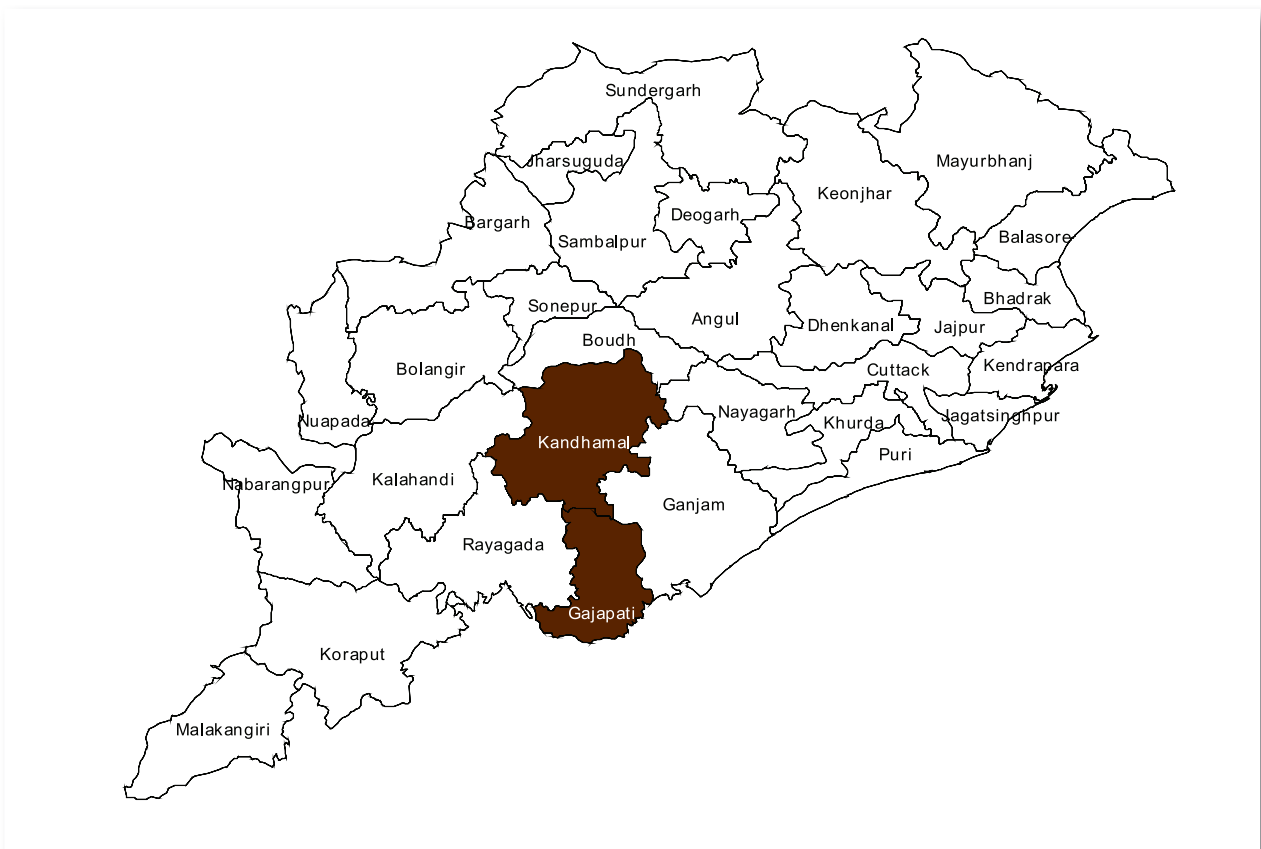
There is fear and worry among villagers but the bigger problem is lack of opportunities. He says he is lucky to have got the opportunity to study at a *Jawahar Navodaya* school and says he dreams of following the footsteps of the District Collector who made this possible.

## 3.2 Odisha

In Odisha, 19 out of the 30 districts are affected by Maoist violence<sup>21</sup>. At the time of the field visit, five villagers, reportedly Maoists, were shot dead by security forces in the Mohana area in a forest on the border of Odisha's Ganjam and Gajapati districts.

The slain ultras reportedly belonged to a group headed by Maoist leader Sabyasachi Panda. Panda, who after being expelled from the CPI (Maoist), had formed the Odisha Maobadi Party,<sup>22</sup>.

**Map of Odisha showing the districts (Gajapati and Kandhamal) visited for data collection and case story documentation**



<sup>21</sup> Source: 2011 data of Union Ministry of Home Affairs, quoted by South Asia Terrorism Portal; however, according to Odisha Police, the number of affected districts is now down to 9 (Statement in The Hindu, Nov.7, 2012)

<sup>22</sup> The Times of India, dated 14.11.2012

Odisha is one of the few states where the Maoist movement is still said to be driven by ideology. The battle against the establishment has escalated over the years because of liberalization and growing industrialization, but the Maoist cadre is still willing to engage with the government. However the Maoists have always been critical of the state government's development model and have opposed massive mining and power projects because they would result in large-scale displacement and disenfranchisement of tribals.

As stated earlier, in the last few years, following a number of cases of kidnappings, encounters and attacks on government facilities, tension began to build within the Maoist ranks itself. As per the records, there are about 23 officially identified Maoist groups said to be currently active in the country (Dubey 2013). Differences began to creep between these groups as well. The Maoist movement appeared to be spinning out of control. As public outrage grew, the Odisha faction of CPI (Maoist) decided to disassociate itself from its Andhra counterparts. Even after the split, the Maoist's stronghold remains and they continue to have enormous community support.

Currently, according to the state police, the most affected districts of Odisha are Gajapati, Malkangiri, Koraput, Ganjam, and Kandhamal. The region looks idyllic with vast tracts of rich forests but the mountainous terrain makes it extremely daunting and impossible to access. To control the growing influence of Maoists, the Centre set up the Special Operations Group (SOG), on the lines of Andhra Pradesh's Grey Hounds<sup>23</sup>, trained to tackle armed guerilla militia. Combing operations are on continuously to flush out Maoist groups.

During one of these operations, five villagers were killed at Bhaliaguda village in Gajapati district of Odisha in November 2012. The incident continues to resonate across the area. The victims were not Maoists, said the villagers, who live in Bhaliaguda

and neighboring Malaspada village, but the *Panchayat* members who were supposedly corrupt. They had been summoned by Maoist leaders at the *Praja Adalat* (people's court). After the incident, security forces patrolled the area round the clock, making the stretch from Bhaliaguda right up to the block headquarters in Mohana, a fortress.

Fear sits like a dark shadow on these villages after the attack. The community is always on the guard and refuses to speak to anyone. Security forces keep a hawk's eye on everyone's movement. Schools are empty and children huddle inside their homes, unwilling to meet strangers. No one ventures out either in the fields or forests.

One day late in the evening, when there was hardly any visibility due to the darkness, a group congregated near a fire at the periphery of the village and slowly opened up about the hostile conditions they live in. On the condition of maintaining their anonymity, they shared their experience of leading a life of constant fear and insecurity. Their lives, they said, are always on the edge. An elderly lady, who ran a shop, said that for generations everyone lived here in peace, they were happy with whatever nature provided them. "When the school was built, it was a new beginning for a new hope and aspiration. But within no time, we have lost our state of peace and security," she remarked.

The group during the discussion also mentioned that the Maoists never caused any harm to them. No child has ever been recruited in their army from these parts nor has the community faced any kind of threat to their lives. But after the security forces set up base close by, life has completely changed and become extremely restricted. The schools have stopped functioning, as no teacher is willing to come to school. It is no longer possible to enter the forest areas to get firewood and other items of subsistence, children and women have to return home before twilight sets in. Those who used to go to schools outside the village or worked elsewhere can no longer do so.

<sup>23</sup> The Greyhounds unit was launched in early 1989 by N.T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam government after the Maoists killed a few landlords in Prakasam district. Its training programme was conceived by IPS officer K.S. Vyas, who was later assassinated by Maoists during his evening jog at a Hyderabad stadium. (The Telegraph 5th June, 2013). The Greyhounds force is considered an anti-Maoist force that specializes in conducting jungle warfare applying guerrilla tactics to counter those of the Maoists. It is said to be highly successful in demolition of Maoists' stronghold in Andhra Pradesh (The Hindu; March 21, 2010)



The community wants the forces to move away so that normalcy can return to their village. They want their lives back, the school and *Anganwadi* to run and the freedom to move in the forests, like they used to. “Children should have access to their basic right to play study and be secure. They should not be made to lead a life of fear and uncertainty” said Neela, a mother of three children.

Across Gajapati and Kandhamal districts of Odisha, the story remains the same. The war between the police forces and the Maoist groups has crippled the lives of the locals. As a result, the youth and children are being pushed into a zone of darkness. Their rights are being violated indiscriminately.

During the course of the study, it was found that cutting across the sample villages of Guajarati and Kandhamal districts, there is almost no governance. People are aware of their needs and rights and have flagged them several times before the administration (by submitting petitions etc.) but so far the government has not responded. The status quo remains.

## State of Schools

Mohana block in Gajapati district of Odisha is in a way representative of areas that have been branded as Maoist affected. Most villages here are struggling with no resources or support from the local administration. Traveling through the villages in the block creates a sense of déjà vu. The stories are the same and the struggle of the community mirrors each other. And yet, no one seems to have heard them.



**School without boundary wall and inadequate infrastructure<sup>24</sup>**

## The Language Barrier

Four teachers have been newly appointed but two of them can only speak Telugu. However, students here only speak the local Kui language. The result is that the two teachers, who speak Telugu don't attend the school as they have language restriction. The third teacher stays at the district headquarters and uses the same reason of language barrier to excuse himself from not coming to the school. Only the fourth teacher, who lives close to the school, manages to come to school regularly. Hence the students find reasons to not attend the school. Attendance is extremely poor, out of the 73 children enrolled, only 23 were present at the time of the visit. Babulal, whose nine-year-old daughter dropped out of school to help him in the farm, said that fake enrolment is quite common to prove that no child is out of school.

As shown in the picture above, many schools run without boundary walls and the required infrastructure. In some cases children are found to be sweeping the areas, fetching drinking water and doing various kinds of manual work in the school premise. The road to Kutnigunda village in the Gajapati district is full of potholes, making it a rough ride. After some point, the road ends, merging into the forests from there onwards, it is a long walk to reach the village. The primary school falls on the way, it is a small structure with no boundary walls, located right at the base of a towering mountain, surrounded by dense forests. It's been 20 years, yet the construction of the building has not been completed

For those children who do attend school, it is more of a ritual. They are all herded together in one room and taught only one or two subjects. Often, they sit on the verandah and scribble in their notebooks because there is no light inside the classroom. Many of them still have not learnt to write basic words.

In terms of infrastructure, the school is severely handicapped. There is a hand pump just outside the school premises but other than that, even the basic facilities like toilets and the kitchen are not

<sup>24</sup>Source: Photo Taken by the Research Team during data collection in Nov 2012

available. Children across Mohana have most no opportunities to learn and perform better. There is lack of power supply, shortages of books, teaching learning materials and the teachers in the area. Classes are held irregularly and learning levels are abysmally low since students are not taught properly. This was also highlighted by Supriya Sharma (2011) that most teachers neither speak nor understand the local tribal language, which disrupts the flow of communication in the classroom processes.

Another concern is the area at which the school building is located. It is very unsafe as it is situated on the periphery of a dense forest, at the base of a hill. Children are found playing barefoot in the open space outside the school through the day. At times they are asked to go and collect firewood for the school from the jungles.

A majority of families who live here belong to the Kui tribe. It was also observed that some families continue to be ignorant about the benefits of education and don't send their children to school. Pinki's mother doesn't send her to school, she stays home with her grandmother, and spend time playing in the dust. Her mother doesn't speak much but *panchayat* members say that despite making repeated requests, she hasn't changed her mind.

A majority of parents do understand the need for education to ensure a meaningful life but they want the education system overhauled completely. And they their participation in ensuring better provision for children. *Panchayat* member, Lakshman Naik, believes that the community needs to be involved in decision making, if a positive change is expected. He said that despite several requests, the administration has always ignored the specific needs of this region.

One of the biggest risks that out of school children face is to be forced into child labour or end up sitting at home and to take care of their younger siblings since *Anganwadis* are not functional.

In Kutnigunda village, an *Anganwadi* centre was supposed to have been set up 19 years ago but till date there is no sign of the centre. The *Anganwadi* worker, Sheetla, cooks meals for children at home but there is always an acute shortage of ration. Except for *sattu*, a mix of barley, wheat and gram,

### Lack of accessibility to school and unsafe environment pushes children into child labour

**Suren**, about 11 years old, dropped out of school some four months ago, apparently due to ill-health. He was in grade VI at that time. However, the reality is that his family doesn't want him to go back to school. His father wants an additional hand to help him in the fields. Besides all this, there is no proper accessibility to the school, school is about 12 km away and there is walk through forests and then short travel via road in a jeep to finally reach the school. With the Maoists on a recruitment drive, his family doesn't think it is safe for him to travel that far to study. Suren knows he needs to complete school and go to college to get a job in town but given the conditions he says he doesn't have a choice but to follow what his parents say.

and rice, no other ration are provided by the block office and that is also made available just twice a year. She also has no weighing scale or teaching learning tools.

On the health front, the scenario is quite similar, for instance immunization rounds never take place and a majority of children below five years have not even received any vaccination in this area. Sheetla's young brother in law, who has made several rounds to the block offices to get ration, says he always returns empty-handed. According to him, there is

### Sibling Care

Four-year-old **Mahipal** carries her little brother on her back as she strolls through the forests. The baby is nine months old and cannot be left alone. Her mother works in the field, so Mahipal had to drop out of school. She spends her day attending to her brother. There is no *Anganwadi* in the area and she has to ensure that her brother is fed and cared for. She dreams of going to school just like her friends but has come to accept that she cannot, because of her responsibilities.

At four, she is a child but also a foster mother. The dual role seems to have dashed whatever hopes she may have had of a vibrant childhood.

widespread corruption and though everything exists on paper, but on the ground the community gets sub-optimal services. The primary health centre (PHC) in this area is non-operational.

Kuntigunda suffers from the same syndrome that other villages do in Mohana. But it is branded as a Maoist affiliated village. A few years ago, an encounter took place here. Five villagers were shot dead by security forces while returning from the fields. The court exonerated the villagers saying they had no links with Maoists. But the administration doesn't quite agree. It continues to ignore the village, just like every other village in the block. As informed by the villagers, no development funds have been disbursed here.

According to district officials, Mohana and Argora blocks of Gajapati district in Odisha are known to have significant presence of Maoists who prevent any project from taking off. But the community says there has been no interference in education or healthcare. It is the administration that uses the Maoists' presence as an excuse for not implementing any of the government schemes.

Unlike Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, here Maoist groups have never attacked schools or health centres. It was informed that Maoists have organized meetings with villagers requesting them to send their children to school. Teachers, too, participated in these meetings and promised to be regular and educate children appropriately. Since there has been no proactive response from the administration about strengthening schools in villages, a few parents are now sending their children out of the village to *ashram* schools, which have residential facilities.

### **Residential Schools: Is this the solution?**

*Ashram Shalas* (residential schools) are meant to offer both education and security to children who live in regions affected by civil strife. But not all the children want to stay away from home. Students who had dropped out and were back in the villages say they want to study but would prefer to go to a school closer to their home, where teachers teach them well, they are not discriminated against, and are not abused.

The idea of residential schools for children living in remote areas was a boon to many families. Children get free food and accommodation at the hostels. Teachers offer special coaching in the morning and evening to students who may not have gone to school regularly. The coaching classes help these students to get into the mainstream system swiftly. However, in both Odisha and Jharkhand, the *Ashram Shalas* are operated very in effectively. Children are engaged in daily cleaning, sweeping up and other daily chores. Shortage of teachers is another area of great concern, as of now in many schools contractual teachers are being hired to take care of children. Apart from ensuring the safety of children, the ashram schools are also supposed to help children learn better. In the long run, it may be a bigger challenge to make sure that everyone learns the right thing.

#### **Where is the School?**

Sunil Roite, a primary school student, ran away from an *Ashram Shala* because he was made to clean up rooms and didn't get to study at all. He had no books and shoes. He felt lonely staying away from home. But there is no functional school in his village, so he stays at home and plays. At times, he goes herding with the goats. He is not too keen to study. He is frightened of going to school since it appears to be like a punishment for him. There is nothing to draw him to the building, not even the chance to play with his friends.

To meet the education needs of children like Sunil Roite, the community is now stepping forward. A ward member said he had organized private tutors to come to the village and teach children and help them to catch up and get admitted to higher secondary schools at the district. There has been no resistance from the Maoists. In fact, local leaders need to hold meetings with the community, urging them to send their children to schools.

Fear is intense here and it works as a barrier in several ways. No one ventures out in the evenings, especially girls and women, who are extremely vulnerable. Along with the Maoists, presence of the security forces feed this fear among the community members.



Social gatherings are being closely monitored by the security forces, the aim is to track Maoists, who often choose to trade information at the village common grounds. The weekly *bazaar* at Panigunda is very popular, it is an occasion not only for buying and selling wares but also to congregate and share notes. Villagers informed the research team that they are often rounded up and questioned in these bazaars. With movement becoming restricted, communities are increasingly getting locked in. Those who are unable to cope are migrating to towns but there are no livelihood opportunities even there for them, as they lack qualifications and have very limited skills. So many families end up being pushed deeper into deprivation, denying their children their basic right to education, health and a safe childhood.

### **Kandhamal: Dual Burden**

While Mohana and Adona blocks in Gajapati struggle under the impact of Maoist presence, Kandhamal carries the dual burden of Maoist and sectarian violence. Lying on the border of Gajapati and Ganjam, Kandhamal is still recovering from the brutal clashes between the Kandh tribe and Pano Christians, which left both communities shattered. Currently, the war between the Maoist groups and security forces is taking a heavy toll on the community.

Combing operations go on continuously, trying to weed out rebels hidden in the dense forests. Picturesque and rich in resources like most Maoist-affected districts are, Kandhamal continues to be more or less a picture of backwardness. Schools located right on the highway have bare minimum facilities.

In Gadapur village, all 200 students were forced to drop out after grade X, since there was no higher secondary school nearby. Rajkumar Poriche, whose son had to drop out, says he doesn't have money to pay for his son's schooling at a private institution in town. There is also the additional cost of hostel facilities that he cannot afford.

In Bahmanigaon in Gajapati district, believed to be a nerve centre for the guerillas, senior members of the community expressed their rage at the government. They say only those projects where money can be siphoned off are being cleared. So school buildings and boundary walls were being rebuilt but problems such as acute shortage of teachers, which is rampant and across the board, affecting the quality of education significantly, is not being addressed. Other facilities such as books, mid-day meals and co-curricular activities such as sports are also not available.

In the same village, right on the main road, *Sahanubhuti*, a residential school, run by a nun, Sister Victoria, takes care of orphans, abandoned tribal girls and dropouts. Most of the 97 children and adolescent girls who live here have lost their parents in the conflict and have no other support system. Dozens of children are forced to share few rooms and there are no funds for books, stationary or furniture. But it is the only school in the vicinity. The government school got closed.

Sister Victoria believes that the community must be included for solutions to be appropriate for the children. None of these children need charity, it is their right to have a safe and secure life, with access to all opportunities that other children in urban centres get.

Colleges fare no better. Rushmal College<sup>25</sup> at Bahmanigaon in Gajapati district, a partly government aided college takes care of students from four districts, Raigada, Gajapati, Ganjam and Kandhamal. It has six classrooms for 700 students. There is no water and power supply, library facility, school building or even a boundary wall are also not available. Like many other schools in the region it also has an acute shortage of teachers. With no hostel facilities for girls, students have to walk for more than eight km to reach the college. Some come from as far as 25 km on bicycles to attend classes.

Till recently, security forces had occupied the premises which meant many students could not complete their courses. When the encounter stake

<sup>25</sup> The photograph of this facility is not being published as the staff was apprehensive about it.

place, the environment becomes more sensitive and tense impacting the attendance significantly. Nature takes its own toll as well. During monsoons, with no access to roads, students stay back home. Teachers say the ongoing conflict has left parents scared and so they are unwilling to send their wards to school or college, especially when there are incidents of violence. Bullu dropped out of school early. The fear he experiences is overwhelming. In the village, security forces interrogated him about the shootouts in the forests forcing him to stay back at home.

In Poiguda village in Daringibari block in Kandhamal district, located deep in the interiors, surrounded by forests, the primary school has six students and one teacher. Besides a small room, there is a ramshackle shed, where midday meals are supposed to be cooked. Villagers say there are at least 55 children in the village but most of them are not enrolled because the only subject taught is Oriya. A majority of families belong to the Saura tribe and they do not understand Oriya.

Cutting across all categories, language seems to be a major barrier even in this case. So is malnutrition, which is rampant. The *Anganwadi* is located far away from the village, making it hard for children to access the services. Besides, the *Anganwadi* worker comes to the village once in a while. Even those who do manage to complete primary school usually drop out because the middle and secondary schools are located in faraway areas.

In Mahaguda village in Kandhamal district, there is a residential school where 40 students are enrolled. There are only two teachers and two rooms for boarding facilities. On a working day, none of the teachers are present and the school premise, which has no boundary wall, windows or doors, is very insecure. The girls manage the school on their own since the teachers do not live in the premises even though it is their responsibility. Most of the students, who desperately want to study, said they would drop out after grade V.

The school is just a structure and represents a complete violation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009. All the students housed here have come

from far off places in search of education, a basic right that is being denied to them. They have learnt nothing and are unable to respond to any of the questions, related to any subject in their course. So even though there is a massive demand for quality education and parents are making effort to send their children to school far away from home, expecting a better and safe life for them, the State unfortunately has failed to meet their needs.

Just like in Chhattisgarh, the strongly meshed tribal community is slowly tearing apart. Violence is now embedded in their lives and that is now seeping into their way of life. Bullu, who is around 16 years old is a school dropout and works as a construction labourer. After his father passed away, he had no option but to work and fend for his family. But he says, the youth is not safe anymore. On his way to work, security forces beat him up for loitering. The fear is so overwhelming that he stutters while speaking. He says several adolescent boys have turned to alcohol and fights have become common.

In the interiors, there seems to be total collapse of the governance system. Struggling to cope with violence and government apathy, villages say they have no voice. The prolonged battle has left them with nothing except complete devastation. Families try to build their lives under the specter of violence but the impact is enormous. Villages are no longer willing to be caught in the crossfire. They want justice for themselves as they have faced many incidents of conflict.

Kirke, who has lived in Sunderponka village for more than 30 years, says tribals do not harm or abuse each other. Traditionally, the community was close-knit and took care of each other. Today, criminal acts are taking place because there is pent-up anger among the youth. They see no future for themselves. After a couple of young tribal boys raped a teenager and murdered her, there is growing concern that traditional tribal values are under threat now. Kirke says adolescent boys and girls need a purpose. Educating them well and ensuring that they have livelihood opportunities can curb many of these incidents.

Overall, the Maoist affected districts share the same problems in Odisha –absence of effective state machinery and commitment to ensure education to all. Under the guise of Maoist violence, village after village children are being denied the right to have basic services such as education, safety and health. The only way to extract children from this complicated web of conflict is through education, vibrant, functional schools that impart quality education through responsible and committed teachers. These schools must include co-curricular activities such as sports and ensure children’s security and their all-round development.

### 3.3 Jharkhand

In the state, 23 out of 24 districts are affected by Maoist violence. In India, Jharkhand is believed to be the richest state with vast reserves of mineral and forest wealth and yet some of the most marginalized

tribal communities live here. The state houses more than 30 types of minerals (Government of Jharkhand, 2011) and about 40 per cent of India’s minerals come from Jharkhand<sup>26</sup>.

For decades, Maoist groups have controlled many parts of the state. Its close proximity to West Bengal, where the Naxal movement was born in the sixties, has enabled Maoist groups to strengthen its base (Dubey 2013). This has further escalated the level of violence in the state. The government’s current focus is to control Maoist groups, so more security forces are being deployed to search and take down radical groups. Because of the complexity, armed operations like Operation Green Hunt have done more damage to the community than good. Sometime this operation said to be just a media myth and consequently this became a shoebox of news clippings, police reports, public demonstrations and armed encounters<sup>27</sup>.

**Map of the state of Jharkhand showing districts (Khunti and Lohardaga) visited for data collection and case story documentation**



<sup>26</sup> Report of the Chief Minister’s Committee for the Development of Jharkhand, 2011

Across districts in the state, tension prevails, both in towns as well as in the interiors. However, here, in village after village, children show great interest in going to school. For them it is an incentive, to study, play and get a hot meal. But not all schools are functional and those that are running have few facilities. Lack of teachers is the biggest impediment. The second barrier is the medium of instruction. Most of the children speak their mother tongue, which is often local tribal languages like Mundari, Kharia, or Asuri while the teachers teach in Hindi. The end result is poor or no communication. So while children attend classes, they do not comprehend as the teacher is speaking in a language that they do not understand.

In the last five years, it is believed that Khunti district of Jharkhand has registered the highest number of Maoist-related incidents as well as criminal casualties in the state. The impact on the community is evident. No one speaks to outsiders. Travel is unsafe and many officials prefer to work out of the district headquarters and have never paid visits to distant villages. Contractors, engaged for building schools or roads are the only presence in these remote areas.

In Tapkara village, in Torpa block, a middle school is getting refurbished. Out of 337 registered students, 237 attend school. During the harvest season, absenteeism is extremely high. There are five classrooms to cater to student from grade I to grade VIII. Two of them have just come up after a school review team found all classes crammed into three rooms. Nine teachers were allocated but three seats remain vacant and out of six one is a private teacher, hired by the community. Each child pays Rs.15 per month for his salary. Out of the five temporary teachers, two are out for audits, while the others are engaged in the school's paperwork. Students from grade VI, end up teaching their juniors.

The school has not received supplies for mid-day meals so no food has been served for over a month. There's no electricity, no hand pump for water, so bathrooms are locked up. Ironically, six months ago,

education department officials reviewed the school and recommended that these gaps be addressed. But nothing has moved so far as informed by local community members.

At best, most children have learnt Hindi. Grade VI students were learning multiplication and that too many faltered on being asked when asked questions. So for courses like mathematics and science, families engage private tutors at home.

Teachers admitted that many parents do not want to send their wards to school if they live in far off villages. The insecure environment and the fear that they could be attacked while traveling forces parents to pull out their children from school after the primary level.

A few kilometers away in Kalet village, the primary school has an impressive, brand new compound wall but the student strength is only 11 for grade I to III. Four have dropped out. In the school, out of two contractual teachers appointed, one has been deputed to Tirla block. The other teaches all students in one room. There's no power and the available water is not drinkable. Bathrooms are damaged and rations have run out. Supplies cannot be made available since there is no stock at the block level. Children wear torn clothes and have no shoes. Several of them are malnourished. Most of them play outside and can barely read.

At Fatka, about 90 km from Khunti, the district headquarters, the primary school is in shambles. Though it is the *panchayat* headquarters, schools in Fatkaarein poor shape. As per the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and Right to Education 2009 (RTE) framework, a school must be built within a kilometer of a village. This decision was taken by the government to reduce the risks of students having to travel long distances but apart from buildings, there is little else. Teachers don't come out of fear, reading material, tables and chairs are not available. There is a single teacher, newly appointed, who is at a loss. He belongs to Torpa and speaks in Hindi while the children speak Mundari. He is unclear about the number of children enrolled or the drop out figures. One seat of the teacher remains vacant.

<sup>27</sup>The Hindu, 6 February 2010

Located in the middle of dense forests and difficult terrain, he says security is a major issue here. There is no boundary wall. Children, who come from nearby villages, bring their younger siblings along so that they can share the mid-day meals since the Anganwadidoes not function.

Like other schools, there is no power and the water is red in color, completely unfit for drinking. There are no books either. Old books are being distributed. Similarly, uniforms & shoes are also not available. Children sit outside, as the classrooms are too dark to study. The teacher was busy with his own paper work. The cook, appointed like elsewhere in the state, by the village *Mahila Samiti*, says she has run out of rice for a couple of months now and there is none available at the block. Clearly, the mid-day meals scheme incentive for children to attend school is also being undermined.

None of the children speak. It is not just the language barrier, though the children attend school but are not being taught anything. The textbooks and the notebooks are simply paper to them. Hiring a local person, well-versed in Mundari, is one way of overcoming this problem. But the government ironically appoints, what is termed, outsiders to these remote hamlets, due to which the process of imparting proper education is impaired.

Across the river, in Targia village, teachers pack up before sundown. They live far away and the village is the hub for Maoist groups like People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI). There is a massive school compound, the first of its kind that was built in this area. But parents say they do not send their children there because the school never runs. The village has about 100 children but only 13 children have enrolled. Out of which only six students attend classes. Out of four teachers appointed, one is missing. The teachers call it as a punishment posting.

Situated in the midst of dense forests, the terrain is treacherous. There are no roads or bridge across the river. The administration never built any so during the monsoons, the school is unreachable. There is no boundary wall either. Within the community, there is anger. Parents say teachers are absent for long periods and are unable to teach because they do not know the language.

Teachers are also afraid of Maoist groups, who come and extort money from them. So far, schools have not been attacked by any armed groups. But community members say they have no problems with the radical groups. Their children are not stopped from going to school. But adolescents, many of who are dropouts, have enlisted with the rebels for lack of options. Apart from farming, there are no other livelihood opportunities, forcing the youth to take up arms. Some have been forcibly picked up and recruited as *sangam* members.

In many parts of Khunti district, there seems to be complete absence of the government administration. Anganwadis do not run and if they do, it is usually from homes. Primary health centres don't function either. People travel several kilometers to access basic health facilities. But despite being denied their rights and struggling against all odds, a majority of the parents want their children to go to school. Children themselves want to go to school because to them, it is the only way for a better future.

### **District: Lohardagga, Jharkhand**

Among the high-risk districts, Lohardagga, is a complex cauldron of conflict. Rich in mineral resources, there is an ongoing battle between the government, industry and the Maoist groups for control. Encounters are common, and the climate is one of intense fear. Traveling into the interiors is fraught with danger. Anyone can be stopped and interrogated. Children in this district live under the constant threat of being recruited by the Maoists as informers. They are also given training on fire arms and planting landmines. The age of recruitment is very low and it could be as low as 10-12 years. Frightened and worried, parents send their children far away to pursue higher studies.

At Bhandra, near the district headquarters, a Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, (KGBV), a residential school, has come up for Grade VI to Grade XII. At KGBV, 181 girls have enrolled, out of which 167 are present. Despite the beautiful building, there are no chairs or tables for students. They sit on the floor and study. There is no bedding for seniors nor are enough utensils available.



There are 10 teachers, five of whom are on deputation and two are part-timers. Only three teachers are full-timers and they teach Hindi, Physical Training and Social Science. The temporary teachers take two classes and then leave. Since they are contractual workers, there is no accountability. The permanent teachers often double up as wardens too.

Teachers say the students are keen to learn and progress but the system does not help. Many of those who have enrolled are previous dropouts and need extra classes to catch up. But that does not happen. So they continue to lag behind. Most of the children speak Kuruk, Kharia and Nagpuri languages but the teachers speak only Hindi. Unable to adapt, teachers push for transfers.

Villagers say absenteeism of teachers is rampant and even when teachers come, they leave in a few hours citing security problems. There is constant shuffling of teachers, who are unwilling to teach in these remote locations. Srikrishna Mohan Seth, one of the three teachers, on his way home from school in the afternoon described his position as a punishment posting and said that he was trying to move to a different school.

This environment of uncertainty impacts the learning process. Along with building schools, the infrastructural and personnel support is crucial, if the objective of imparting quality education is to be achieved.

In Tisia Village in Kisko block of Lohardagga, 30 km from the district headquarters, the middle school, meant for students up to Grade VIII lies abandoned. There are five teachers to cater to 200 students in the village. All of them are absent. The old rooms are completely damaged, their roofs about to collapse and the new rooms can only house two senior classes. The junior classes are forced to sit outside in the compound. The boundary wall is so low that children climb over it and run into the forests behind the school.

Like elsewhere, there is no electricity or hand pump. The bathrooms are non-functional. None of the junior class students have any books. They spend the day playing outside. Almost all of them have not learnt to read and write. These students come to school with the hope of learning but end up being denied their basic right to education. With no teachers attending schools regularly, only about 50 to 60 children come to school. The rest stay away. Caught in the midst of Maoist violence, many of them are forcibly recruited to join armed groups. It may be noted that the Maoist groups, particularly the CPI(Maoist), recruits minors, both boys and girls, from the tribal belt in the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Odisha. In Bihar and Jharkhand, these children are enrolled in 'Bal Dasta' and in Chhattisgarh and Odisha, the children's squad is known as 'Bal Sangam'<sup>28</sup>.

## The Way Forward

The law of India mandates all children between the age of 6- 14 to be in school. It is also clear that children from all these communities want to go to school. Living in remote, inaccessible parts, ignored by the administration, there is still faith that education is the fulcrum of change. There is demand for education, a fundamental right for all children, but the government despite several schemes, including the IAP, meant only for districts affected by Maoist violence, has not met its mandates. Children living in conflict zones need and deserve special attention. Since they face a number of challenges, the government needs to urgently review the status of all schools and ensure that each of them is equipped with all the necessary requirements, including adequately trained teachers, infrastructure and a protected environment so that children can access qualitative and relevant education close to their homes.

In the immediate term, residential schools can meet the need for security but it is important to have

<sup>28</sup>Unstarred Question number 3676, Lok Sabha. Question was asked by Mr. Virendra Kumar and answered on 19.03.2013; Accessed on 09.10.2013.

good standards in these institutions. Steps should be taken to ensure that children in these schools do not feel discriminated or alienated. Families prefer to have high schools closer home. Depending on the prevailing conditions, the government must take steps to bring every child into school. Since Maoist-affected districts also fall in the tribal belt, the curriculum for tribal students should ideally be relevant to their context and suit their needs. Teachers need to speak the local languages in order to communicate better, especially in the early years, graduating to a mainstream language.

But most significantly, engaging the community is perhaps the best possible point of entry to engender change. SMCs as mandated by the RTE should be constituted, Household based follow ups can be initiated with the help of self-help groups such as *Mahila* or *Mata Samitis*, to identify dropout children and get them back into the system. Currently, they play an important role in providing cooks and other support for schools. Once children remain in school and obtain quality education, it will help open new doors for job opportunities and external influences like Maoist groups will have less impact on the lives of children. Besides, regular reviews of the state

of the schools, mapping of the existing gaps is also required so that course correction is possible.

Since the government has the wherewithal and the responsibility to provide quality education to all children under the Right to Education Act (2009), all it needs is commitment and the will to deliver so that children living in conflict zones can fulfill their dreams in a safe and secure environment. Education offers the appropriate platform to create this door of opportunity.



## Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

The data gathered, while carrying out the study, clearly reflects that children living in areas of civil strife need urgent interventions. Growing up in a hostile environment of violence, being denied every constitutional right and knowing that their future is endangered, has had a deep-seated impact on the Adivasi children. The consistent violence is adversely affecting the lives and education of these children. Further, the lack of educational facilities both in areas where schools are not available and where they are, the dismal state inside schools has denied them the opportunity to learn and grow. Invisible for so long, these children are now demanding that they be given their fundamental rights – to go to school and be safe.

### Recommendations:

#### Overarching Recommendations

Though the report primarily aims at understanding the process that deny children their basic rights, especially the right to education and protection in civil strife affected areas. There are certain foundational conditions that need to be met. Accordingly, the section below underlines a set of recommendations that will lead to creation of a conducive environment for children living in civil strife affected areas.

1. Strict enforcement of existing national, international child protection norms and standards on the ground in civil strife affected regions of India.
2. All children allegedly in conflict with law must be brought under the juvenile justice system and must not be dealt with by the adult criminal system, or put into prisons meant for adult convicts and under-trials.

3. Strengthening the implementation of Juvenile Justice Act (JJ Act) and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and creation and strengthening of Juvenile Justice Boards and Child Welfare Committee and District Child Protection Units, (as mandated by the ICPS and JJ Act) for every district is important.
4. Sensitization of armed forces on Juvenile Justice Act, UNCRC (especially on the involvement of children in armed conflict) and other national and international child protection standards and norms.

### Schools as Zones of Peace

- It is imperative that in the civil strife affected areas schools and areas with in the immediate vicinity of schools be demilitarized and developed as zones of peace. Under no condition school and areas adjoining it should be occupied by the security forces or targeted by the Maoist. There are evidences of schools being occupied by security forces in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand and these should be evacuated immediately. An inclusive environment must be created in schools where children learn to live and grow without fear and to achieve this demillitarisation of schools is a must<sup>29</sup>. Since there is no evidence of Maoist targeting schools, teachers, Anganwadis and health centers, Government must focus on development efforts and initiate measures to build confidence among Adivasis.
- Further, the Government should make efforts to train and sensitise the security forces to deal with children, or separate provisions under law for children affected by civil strife should be made.

<sup>29</sup>Under section 27 and 28 of Chapter 4 of the RtE Act, teachers are prohibited from being deployed for non-education purposes. Save the Children asserts that a similar clause should be added to the Act that says, "Schools should only be used for educational purposes, and definitely not occupied by security forces of any kind." Recommendation made to the National Advisory Council on 'Educational Rights of Excluded Communities' by Save the Children, India and Action Aid, April 5, 2012

## Quality of Schools

- The educational landscape of these areas is marked by shortage of teachers, high absenteeism among teachers, and inadequate infrastructure.
- Given the harsh geographical terrain, lack of security and fear of potential violence, hundreds of children drop out from schools. To curb this, primary schools must be established within the vicinity of every village.
- Addressing the non-availability of teachers and the poor quality of teaching is imperative for bringing about qualitative difference in the existing situation. Presently, the number of teachers is not enough to cater to all children. The shortage of teachers, especially at upper primary level, for subjects like Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences is severe.
- There must be enough teachers to cater to all children in the existing schools and the teachers who are hired must know the local language and should live close to the schools. The practice of hiring temporary or contractual teachers is also doing more harm than good. High absenteeism among teachers is another issue that needs to be addressed on a priority basis.
- Providing adequate infrastructure, especially basic facilities like electricity, water, boundary walls and toilets is absolutely essential for the proper functioning of these schools and from the perspective of security and safety of children.
- Save the Children India recommends that in view of the above hurdles, the distance and Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) norms need to be relaxed to ensure the rights of the children to study in safe and secure environment.

## Teachers and Teacher training

- Recruitment of appropriate and trained teachers is of utmost importance and vacancies must be filled on an urgent basis.
- There is strong need to work towards improving the teaching learning practices among teachers and duty holders in schools. To ensure this,

there should be provisions of special training of teachers who work on civil strife affected areas. The in-service training curriculum should have components to understand and provide specific regional, ethnic, social and cultural requirements of the students.

- Furthermore, teachers working in hard-to-reach areas must be given special incentives and mobility support. This would encourage them to work in such critical conditions.

## Psycho-Social Support

- Providing Psycho-social support to children who have suffered trauma is crucial in helping them grow, develop and reach their potentials. School teachers have an important role in helping children fight their fears, share their grief and overcome their sense of loss.
- Counseling and moral support to teachers is also critical since they need to guide children through this transition phase- from being out of school due to conflict to getting back to normalcy. It is critical that teachers know how to communicate both with parents and children in order to restore faith in the system. Ward members can also help to facilitate this process.

## Residential Schools

- Save the Children believes that children should have the opportunity to study in the community or home. In civil strife affected areas, the circumstances are such that institutional care may be suggested as a temporary solution. However, it should not take the form of living and studying in crammed and poorly maintained Porta cabins.
- In residential schools, which are often in news for incidents of sexual abuse of the inmates, there should be child protection mechanisms to protect the children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. Also, strengthening the implementation of Juvenile Justice Act and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) should be undertaken.

## Curriculum

- The pedagogy and curriculum must be revised to suit the needs of children living in civil strife affected areas. Evidence from around the world shows that curriculum rooted in context and tradition like local music, song, storytelling, and drama not only aid in learning process but are also therapeutic for children affected by violence. Further, since learning and cognitive abilities are adversely affected by violence, the methodology of teaching and the study material must be sensitive to the needs of children. Self-expression among children in the form of painting, drawing, debates, discussions, creative writing, drama and games should be promoted.
- Availability of senior secondary schools in the vicinity is also essential and these schools must impart vocational skills and computer trainings.
- Textbooks need to be reviewed from the learner's perspectives so a bridge can be made between the social experiences and classroom learning as emphasized by National Curriculum Framework, 2005.
- Language has emerged as a major obstacle in learning process in these pockets as majority of the teachers do not understand the local dialects of the children. Multi Lingual Education Policy must be operationalised in these states as stated in the Constitution.

TLM that caters to these civil strife affected regions should equip both the teachers and students with the cultural and socio-political environments of these regions.

## Recreation and Play

- Music and dance is a vital part of Adivasi life. For children who have faced violence and have internalized it, engaging in learning processes proves to be difficult. In such circumstances music, dance and sports are highly effective coping strategies and should be actively promoted.
- Promotion of football, archery and other popular local sports will ensure that children

come to school and not drop out of school. Participating in these activities can also help in building confidence, which in turn will benefit their cognitive abilities. For those who perform outstandingly in sports, fellowships to train under special coaches should be provided. Sports and incentives like fellowships will offer them a platform to define and shape their future.

## Community Engagement

- One of the key findings of the study was that linkages between communities and schools are weak. Efforts need to be made to strengthen community participation in schooling and education. A key vehicle for this could be the formation of School Management Committees (SMCs), as stated under Right to Education Act, 2009. School Development Plans should also be made for engaging the larger community and budgetary provisions must be put in place to allocate funds required for smooth functioning of schools .
- SMCs along with the *Panchayat* members and education officials should identify the out of school children, and keep a track of them. To this end, awareness is needed among community members about the role of SMC and its importance in promoting wellbeing of all children. Further creating active children groups in schools to raise awareness on issues of conflict and creating a proper mechanism to raise any concern is also needed. Social audits can also help in monitoring the functioning of schools.

## Equity of Facilities

- The administration must ensure equity for tribal children in schooling. Special focus should be given to schools and Teacher Training Institutes by providing financial, human and infrastructural resources to ensure quality services.
- Instead of setting up temporary schools in Porta Cabins, the government needs to set up well-run residential schools such as Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas closer to the habitations (within a 10

km radius) up to Grade XII for children in 6 to 18 years age group, who live in the interiors or have lost their parents in conflict. These schools must provide comprehensive facilities for marginalized children including quality education, health care, and academic support classes.

- In situations where there are no school buildings or have been destroyed, temporary structures could be set up for a period of 1 year, until a new school is constructed. As far as possible, children should not be separated from their families and communities. Every school must have proper child protection safeguards to protect a child from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.
- Institutionalized system must be in place for the coordination of ICDS and School Education Department to ensure smooth functioning of these institutions with improved quality of services.

### **Monitoring and Academic Support**

- The government officials and civil society groups need to make joint visits to schools for monitoring and academic support. Senior administrative officials such as District Collectors need to set an example by carrying out frequent field visits and asking block officials to submit regular reports on the status of schools. These also need to be reviewed from time to time, so that the gaps, mis-reporting and corruption can be tracked. Social audits can also help in monitoring the functioning of schools.
- Students must not be made to work as labor or cleaning staff. Girls especially must be treated with dignity and their safety must be ensured.

### **Counseling to tackle Gun Culture**

- It is a known fact that there cannot be one development model that fits all. For tribals and their children, the context is different and therefore the development plan has to be suited to that context. For instance, there is a growing concern among tribal groups that this overarching culture of violence that has lasted so long is slowly tearing away the social fabric of adivasis. Rapes and murders, which were unheard of among Adivasis, have begun to

occur as the youth being witness to such grave violence in the hands of both parties have begun to think of it as a new norm. In Chhattisgarh, *Salwa Judum* has also added fuel to the fire by arming young boys and girls, as young as nine years to fight against their own people. The initial need to protect one-self has now turned into a heady rush for power and the ability to control a situation through violence. Counseling against such activities must be included in the school curriculum along with trauma mitigation for those who have survived acts of violence.

### **Child soldiers**

As per the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000), a child soldier is any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms. Using children as child soldiers is also a violation of ILO Convention No. 182 which defines forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict as a worst form of child labour. Specific recommendations related to this aspect are:

- Both the Armed Groups (Maoist) or the Security forces must refrain from using children as child soldiers, and active steps need to be taken to prevent recruitment of children into armed groups.
- All child soldiers must be demobilised and social reintegration of child soldiers should take place as per the Cape Town principles.
- As per the Security Council Resolution 1612 there is a need to establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) on grave violations of children's rights in civil strife areas.
- All children allegedly in conflict with law must be brought under the juvenile justice system and must not be dealt with by the adult criminal system, or put into prisons meant for adult convicts and under-trials.

## **Orphaned Children**

Orphan children, i.e. those who have lost either one or both parents in the civil strife should be provided good quality care. Officials need to explore whether to place them under kinship care or other appropriate family/ community based options of alternative/ foster care as envisaged under the ICPS and the JJ Act. Institutionalization of children should be the “last resort”. Efforts should be made to place the children with extended family members or under other alternative care. Where placement of a child in an institution is inevitable or is in the best interest of child, there needs to be proper child protection safeguards within the institution to protect a child from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

## **Child labour**

Ongoing civil strife has a destructive impact on the socio economic environment in the tribal areas. There is need to have concerted efforts to ensure that children don't get involved in child labour but go to school. There is a need to map such vulnerable children and to ensure that they get access to social protection schemes and special training to mainstream them in schools as recommended by the RtE Act, 2009. STPs, NCLP and National Skill Development Programme under NSDC should be implemented in the Civil Strife affected zones.

## **Conclusion**

The community, living on the margins for so long, is now attempting to step forward and ask the government to deliver on its promises. But if the expectations of common people continue to be unfulfilled then the situation is likely to escalate further. It seems that the government's primary agenda continues to be rapid industrialization. The policies of government need to include tribal populations in the development matrix. In fact, it is evident that much of the violence is instigated because of the government's and outsiders' attempt to grab tribal resources without consulting them (Navlakha, 2006).

In most of the states, tribal uprisings is often backed by Maoists and are inevitably linked to land acquisition related to mining projects or setting up of

power plants, the corollary of which is mass eviction of tribals. Although the relationship between the Maoist groups and the local communities is now beginning to wane with people demanding an end to violence, the Maoists continue to hold sway.

With the increasing presence of security forces to flush out Maoists, villages have turned into ghettos, closed spaces, where the community has limited interactions with the rest of the world. Despite the innumerable case of kidnapping and extortion, there are other dynamics working in civil strife affected areas. For instance, in the villages where the researchers went, people were not afraid of the Maoists. They had their support. Besides, the Maoists don't occupy villages. They come and go, as opposed to security forces which camp in the villages and monitor the movement of villagers constantly.

To mitigate violence in these areas, the government must no longer feign ignorance. It needs to step in, engage with the community, listen to its needs and take the community into confidence. It cannot remain invisible for the people. The support that Maoists enjoy will slowly lessen if the Adivasis feel that the government is taking cognizance of their problems and is attempting to resolve them with full security.

Despite these challenges, the government needs to ensure that the rights of every child are protected in the Maoist affected districts, that they receive quality education and their safety and security is not compromised. Education of relevance and quality provides the children with hope and opportunity. Lack of education does the reverse, leaving children prey to violence and discontent. The government needs to address the inequities that exist currently so that children are able to avail and maximize the opportunities for themselves.

The study has attempted to summarize the key findings from the field and offer solutions to provide optimal schooling and a healthy and happy childhood that thousands of children, living in conflict zones are denied. However, for long term solutions that could be game changers for millions of children, there is an urgent need for more research that can establish the true extent of the situation in an in-depth manner. Information collected through research can help guide and reshape policy for the government to end the cause of conflict and reconstruct an environment of peaceful development.



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# Annexures

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## Annexure I: List of the states affected by Maoist violence

States affected by Maoist violence	
1	Andhra Pradesh
2	Bihar
3	Chhattisgarh
4	Jharkhand
5	Madhya Pradesh
6	Maharashtra
7	Odisha
8	Uttar Pradesh
9	West Bengal

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India 2012

## Annexure 2: Photographs from the field

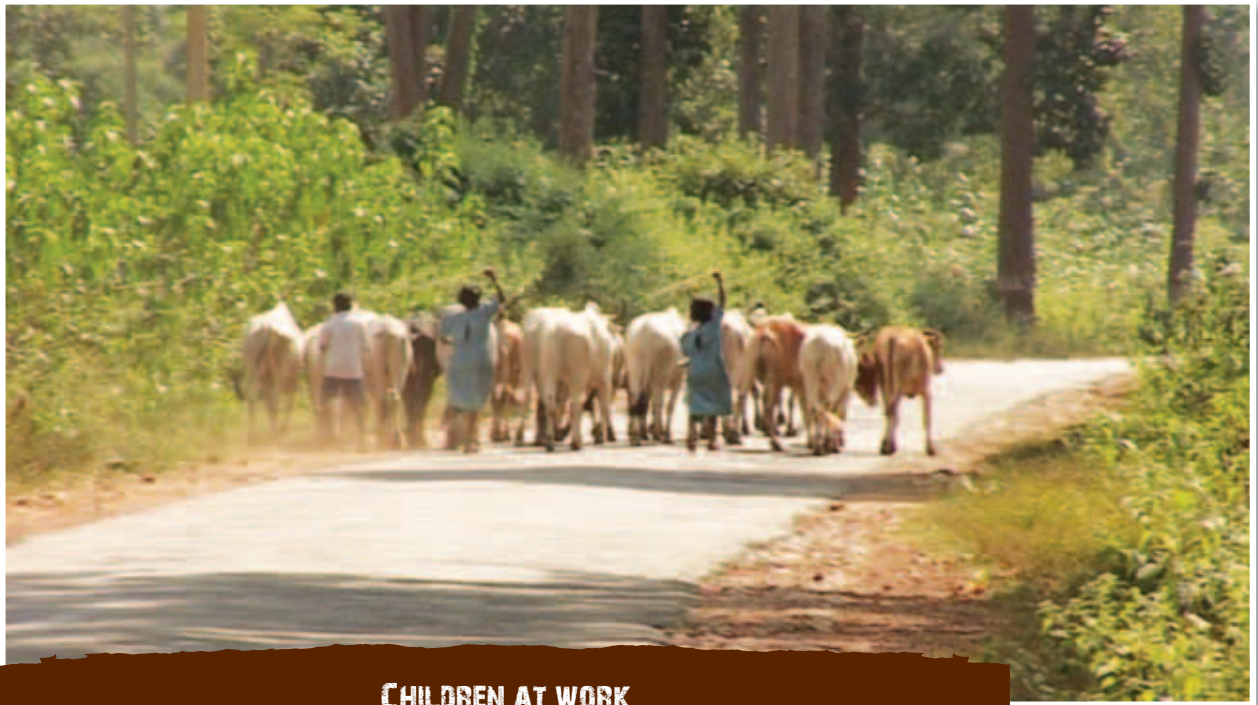


**SCHOOL DESTROYED BY MAOIST GROUPS**



**BURDENED INNOCENCE**



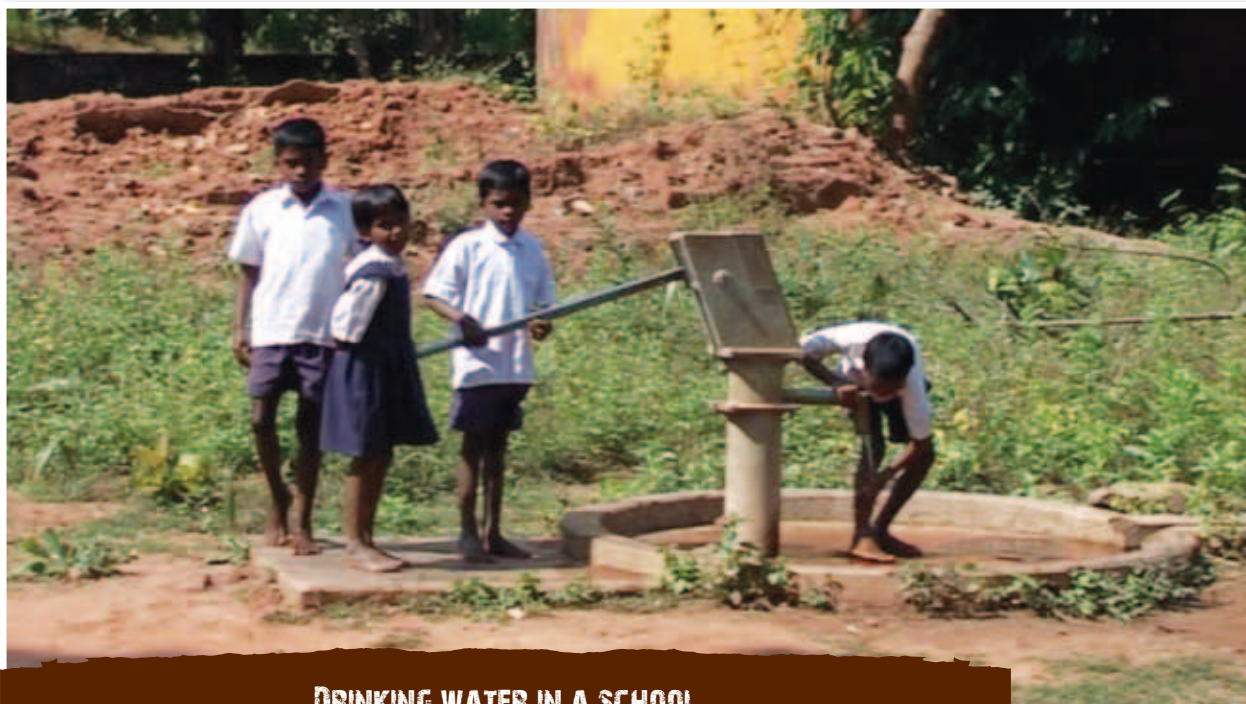


**CHILDREN AT WORK**



**RETURNING FROM WORK**





**DRINKING WATER IN A SCHOOL**



**WORKING IN THE FIELD**

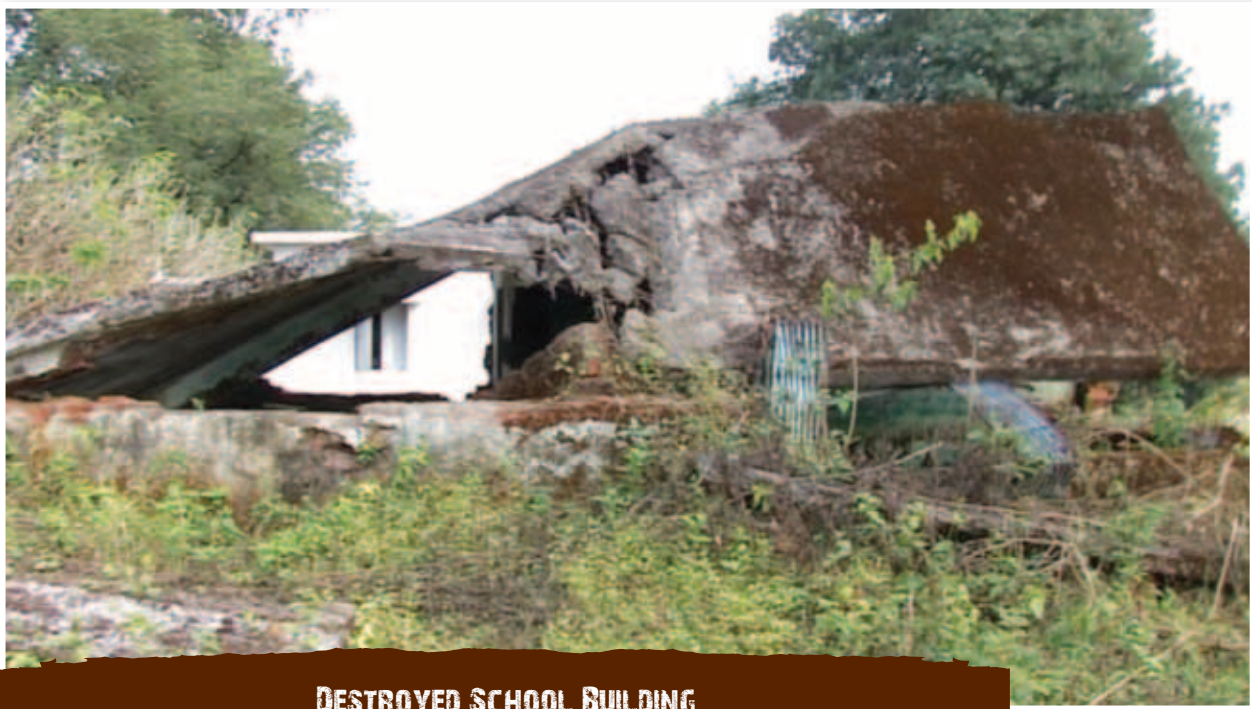


**INSECURE CHILDHOOD**



**EAGER MINDS CHILDREN ENJOYING SOME MOMENTS IN SCHOOL PLAY GROUND**





**DESTROYED SCHOOL BUILDING**



**PORTA CABIN SCHOOLS RUN BY THE STATE GOVERNMENTS**



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