

## **BALANCING BETWEEN GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT**

### **A Fair Mining Policy is an Act of Justice**

Mining is a fault-line of development which runs between ecology and economy. Like an invisible crease in the belly of the earth which can erupt into tremors, mining too causes countless upheavals. In a traditional society like India, the mining fault-lines intersect three crucial territories, i.e., traditional livelihoods, industrial growth and a range of environmental challenges.

Mining is at the root of human conflict with Mother Nature. Before we begin to dig, a variety of rights to *Jal, Jangal, Zameen* (water, forests, land) need to be negotiated or bulldozed. Inherent in the activity is dispossession followed by displacement: of one's hearth and heritage, cultures, and knowledge systems. The collateral damage devours everything in between, from farms to forests and from fisheries to crafts, leaving behind a trail of conflicts and challenges.

But if the country seems indifferent, it is partly because we are programmed to react to catastrophes rather than to challenges. We, like the rest of the world, have learnt to shut our eyes to perils of mining. Conventional wisdom tells us that the modern civilisation cannot do without mining. And the riches are all buried under the idyllic rivers, mountains and forests. We are told it is a necessary evil which is vital for the industry, scientific research, communications, health, and medicines. Not many eyebrows are raised when the fellow citizens who are seen to be 'blocking' the growth are driven out of their lands.

We at Common Cause believe that a fair mining policy should keep the interest of the common man above everything else, beyond profits or growth; it must be treated as an act of justice. We know for sure that the profits come at a huge cost to the environment, human health and livelihoods. While the fruits of mining spread unequally, its climatic cost is borne by everyone. And the biggest irony is that the people to be displaced are the ones who have grown up worshipping and caring for the hills and forests. No wonder, development today is not a value-neutral word; it spells conflict over the environment, natural resources, and their fair distribution.

Clearly, one of the biggest challenges of our times is to strike a balance between the gains and hazards of mining. The moot question is if a middle ground is possible. Is it feasible to do ethical mining which weighs less on our conscience? Can there be transparent and accountable ways of allocating and operating mines? Opinions are divided but many new options are emerging around the world. One of them is to make the sufferers as stakeholders. Another one is to strictly extract only as much as we need. Yet another one is to apportion parts of the profits to create Permanent Funds in the form of Inter-Generational Equity.

This issue of your journal explores all these aspects of mining and their bearing on governance, sustainability and the idea of justice. We try to explore if we have inherited the earth from our ancestors or has it been lent to us by our future generations? If the interest of the future generations is a bigger responsibility than that of our own growth, the economy has to be seen as a subset of ecology. If you agree or disagree with us, please drop us a line. Your comments and responses make the hard work of the Common Cause team worthwhile.

**-Vipul Mudgal**