

# Land for All.....House for All

*Historically, tea workers are adivasis and dalits brought to the plantations as indentured labourers during the colonial period and have been kept along with families in a state of virtual bondage for decades. Women are the main workforce in the plantations. Since the plantations were located in remote areas where there were no alternative livelihood options, labourers depended entirely on the plantation management. Planters curtailed mobility of the entire families and prevented them from doing any other work other than working on the plantations.*

*However, for all the present workers who reside in the tea gardens, these gardens are their homestead land. Their lives are intricately linked with the tea plantations. They have worked here for generations and have contributed to its economy and thereby to the income of the state and nation. Having lost all links with their native place from where they migrated, they have been surpassed by all land reforms.....*

*No son, no house. I continue to live in my house because I have a son who works in the estate.*

*....Lakshmi, a retired worker from Nalamudi estate*

*After working all our life in the tea plantations, when we retire, all we have is a huge debt. We even have to surrender the house which is our homestead land.*

*....Kanyakumari, tea worker from Parryagro plantation*

*I am an adivasi worker working in a tea plantation. I am uneducated. I have problems at home and at work. But I understand that if we fight together, we will be able to get our rights including the right to housing and land rights.*

*....Lalita, tea worker from Dooars*

*Housing is a fundamental right. It is the identification of a citizen. It is also a sentimental issue but has to be converted into the issue of workers struggle in tea plantations*

*...Sunil Babu, trade union leader from Dooars*

*Land rights ensure rehabilitation to decedents of bonded workers in colonial tea gardens. A strong movement will demand housing and land rights for tea workers*

*.... S Manickam, Hill Plantation Workers Union*

## **Why should we demand Housing and Land rights in tea plantations?**

For generations, housing in 'labour lines' in tea plantations has been an instrument of control by planters and a deprivation rather than benefit to workers.

Tea workers have been working in plantations in a state of bondage like situations with low wages and lack of basic amenities including adequate water, sanitation, education, health facilities etc.

According to some reports 40-50 per cent of the land with the tea plantations is vacant /unused.

Neither the increase in prices of tea nor the sops offered by the Government addressed the problems of closed and abandoned tea gardens. Revived gardens have reverted back into crisis and more and more gardens are on the verge of close down.

Lack of livelihood options make tea workers extremely vulnerable and victims of trafficking

It is the primary responsibility of the state to give housing and land rights to plantation workers

Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest-Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 gives right to housing and land rights to adivasis

## **What will Housing and Land rights give workers?**

- An Identity
- Citizenship rights
- Civil and political participation
- Access to government schemes and credit facilities
- Empowerment to women workers
- Alternate livelihood option
- Dignified living

*Housing and Land right is a very vital issue that has been put before the trade union movement through the international tea day campaign. In tea plantations throughout India, this has become an issue. The government cannot ignore it. It has to consider a law on it.*

*....Ashok Ghosh, United Trades Union Congress (UTUC)*

*Our demand for a habitation rights in the tea plantations has been put forth before the government. It is a very crucial campaign issue for the trade unions.*

*.... V Soman, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)*

*The issue of housing and land rights is an extremely critical issue and will be taken by us to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu*

*..... V P Singaravelu, Ex MLA, Tamil Nadu*

*Workers think that housing and land rights cannot be achieved as the planters will not be willing to give them. But the government cannot get away from the responsibility of providing land and housing rights to the 12 lakh workers.*

*.. J. John, Executive Director, Centre for education and Communication (CEC)*