

CHAPTER 8

REHABILITATION AND RESETTLEMENT FOR MINE FIRE

The problems of subsidence and fires of Raniganj coalfields (RCF) and Jharia coalfields (JCF), presently under ECL and BCCL respectively, are the result of unscientific mining carried out by the erstwhile mine owners over more than 200 years of operations prior to nationalization. The population living in the old mining areas increased unabated over the years though these areas were declared unsafe for habitation by the local administration. A High Level Committee was set up (December 1996) by the Ministry by co-opting members from the Ministry, other government departments, coal companies and the concerned State Governments to deal with the problem of fire, subsidence and rehabilitation. Based on the recommendations of the Committee, GoI approved (August 2009) a Master Plan to deal with fire, subsidence and rehabilitation and diversion of surface infrastructure within the leasehold areas of ECL and BCCL at an estimated investment of ₹ 9773.84 crore for coalfields of Raniganj (₹ 2661.73 crore) and Jharia (₹ 7112.11 crore). The salient features of the approved Master plan are indicated in **Annexure V**.

While ECL and BCCL were notified as the Implementing Agencies for handling fire projects and rehabilitation / resettlement of their employees and their families from the unsafe areas of Raniganj and Jharia coalfields respectively, Governments of West Bengal and Jharkhand were to rehabilitate and resettle others (including encroachers) in their respective provincial jurisdiction.

8.1 Implementation of Master Plans

8.1.1 Raniganj Master Plan

ECL shifted the families of all employees from unstable locations. The task relating to rehabilitation of non-ECL families was taken up by Government of West Bengal (GoWB) through Asansol Durgapur Development Authority (ADDA), its administrative agency. ECL also conducted meetings with representatives of ADDA to emphasise timely elimination of constraints hindering the implementation of rehabilitation programme.

8.1.2 Jharia Master Plan

We observed the following shortcomings in the implementation of fire projects by BCCL and rehabilitation of the families of its employees.

- Even after lapse of nine years since JMP was approved, BCCL did not formulate fire fighting activities as envisaged in the JMP. Firefighting activities commenced only in 25 projects (as against 45 projects identified), thereby endangering the lives of the people residing in and around the fire area, besides impacting the environment adversely.
- Although JMP recommended adoption of excavation and back filling technique only in six projects, BCCL adopted it in all 25 projects thereby deviating from the JMP for which no reasons were found on record. National Remote Sensing Centre, Hyderabad reported that the quantum of surface fire which covered an area of 2.018 sq. km in 2014, expanded to 3.28 square km in 2018 due to excavation. We also observed that the extent of underground fire was not assessed. BCCL stated (November 2018) that it did not have the expertise to assess it. We further observed BCCL did not explore the possibility of hiring other agencies to assess the extent of underground fire so far (November 2018).



Pic. 15 & 16: Para No. 8.1.2: Mine fire at Jharia of BCCL

- 70011 quarters⁴⁹ (originally assessed as 79159 quarters but subsequently reduced due to reduction of manpower on the rolls of BCCL) were to be constructed in identified non-coal bearing area. Against this, the status as at the end of November 2018 was as follows.

⁴⁹ Including 15852 quarters for employees and 54159 quarters for others

Table 17: Status of occupancy of quarters in BCCL under JMP

Sl. No.	Quarters	For		Total
		Employees ⁵⁰	Others ⁵¹	
1	To be constructed	15852	54159	70011
2	Actually constructed	7639	6352	13991
3	Percentage of (2) to (1)	48	12	20
4	Actually occupied	3366	2122	5488
5	Percentage of (4) to (2)	44	33	39

Out of the quarters constructed, only 6668 quarters (87 per cent) were allotted to its employees. No action was taken to allot the residual 971 quarters. Further 49 per cent of quarters allotted to employees were lying vacant. Thus infrastructural facilities for resettlement created at a cost of ₹ 51.35 crore⁵² were lying idle. The slow pace of progress in the implementation of JMP exposed the inhabitants to the threat of subsidence and other environmental hazards.

- The stretch of National Highway 32 (NH) between Putki and Godhur, passing over coal bearing fire affected area was to be handed over to BCCL on lease under JMP as decided (November 2009) by Government of Jharkhand to facilitate excavation of coal. Meanwhile, as an interim measure, an alternate route was to be developed and its cost was to be borne by BCCL. Although BCCL deposited (February 2012) ₹ 19.85 crore towards this with the JRDA, it did not obtain possession of the stretch of NH between Putki and Godhur so far (November 2018).

Rehabilitation of encroachers and private legal title holders was taken up by Government of Jharkhand through JRDA.

Audit Summation

BCCL did not formulate fire fighting activities as envisaged in Jharia Master Plan. Fire fighting activities commenced only in 25 projects (as against 45 projects identified). The fires thus continued to endanger the lives of the people residing in and around the fire area, besides adversely impacting the environment.

⁵⁰ to be constructed by BCCL

⁵¹ to be constructed by Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA)

⁵² Total cost of 5576 quarters=₹ 294.86 crore Total cost of 971 unallotted quarters (on average basis) =₹ 294.86*971/5576=₹ 51.35 crore