

Examining Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Process: The Case of Rengali Dam Displaced Communities in Odisha, India

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the outcomes of state-led resettlement and rehabilitation processes in the resettled colonies of Rengali Dam displaced communities in the state of Odisha, India. By employing the descriptive research design and analysing qualitative and quantitative field data, it presents several consequences of the displacement process and how people and communities are impacted by it. It argues that while the Indian state has responded to development-led displaced people with promises of 'resettlement and rehabilitation', in most cases, the State has only confined itself to 'resettlement', neglecting the 'rehabilitation' of displaced communities – many of them Dalits, Adivasis and marginal farmers. Referring to the doctrine of the 'eminent domain of the state', it points out the failure of public policies in the equitable distribution of growth benefits and how it has intensified the vulnerability of the displaced communities. This analysis has implications for future development-led displacement and resettlement and rehabilitation of people and their communities.

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Background to the Study

This article critically analyses field data collected on the resettlement and rehabilitation process of communities displaced by the construction of the Rengali Dam in the Indian state of Odisha. The analysis then forms the basis of the development of an appropriate model for the resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced communities. Dams have been among the major infrastructure projects which have come to symbolise the development path adopted in post-independent India (Baviskar, 2019; Chowdhury, 2018). The construction of most dams has been driven by enormous public and private investment from both domestic and international sources. As the establishment of these development projects has required the acquisition of a large area of land (Bhagat-Ganguly, 2019), many projects have been established on lands owned and farmed by small scale farmers as well as on lands which are commonly owned and used for such activities as grazing, the supply of potable water, and cultural and sporting activities (Chakravorty, 2016). This development-led displacement has significantly impacted the people and communities (Debasree, 2015; Kabra, 2016, Sarap, 2017), often with little gain for them from such development process.

Literature

Development-Induced Displacement (DID) undoubtedly caused conditions of impoverishment for displaced and affected communities (Cernea, 2003; Mathur, 2016). The state of impoverishment relates to not only natural and physical capital but also human and social capital (Agnihotri, 2016; Van der Ploeg & Vanclay, 2017). As the desire for economic growth is continuing to give rise to large-scale development projects in India (Karmakar, 2017; Oskarsson, 2017), it becomes vital to inquire into the resettlement and rehabilitation outcomes (RROs) of completed projects. According to an estimation, around 1.4 million people have been displaced because of different development projects in Odisha (Sahoo, 2005). In the draft National Rehabilitation Policy of 1994, the Government of India (GoI) admitted that around 74.52 per cent of the total displaced communities were still waiting for rehabilitation (Sahoo, 2005). Notably, the livelihood of the displaced communities was not restored in the post-displacement period (Kabra, 2016; Sikka & Mathur, 2018) causing impoverishment for most of the resettled communities in India (Mahapatra, 1999). Hence, it has become essential to relook at the balance sheet of the resettlement and rehabilitation process of displaced communities to see if the situation has changed in the first decades of the present century. This article is broadly divided into two parts. The first part of the article attempts to draw a conceptual and contextual understanding of displacement, in general, and DID, in particular. It integrates the existing literature such as previous research studies, government reports and case studies of development-induced displacement, particularly in the context of India as well as Odisha. The second part of the article presents the balance sheet² of resettlement and rehabilitation processes in the context of Rengali Dam displaced communities.

Conclusion

In sum, the IRR (Cernea, 2000) can be considered as a critical strategy for developing resettlement and rehabilitation plans as long as it considers a full appreciation of local

factors and fully involves peoples from all affected communities in its development and implementation. The IRR model needs to be implemented with a concern for human rights, equity and social justice at its very heart so that marginalised communities are not left with just paying the price of the development. Prior planning needs to be undertaken with a firm eye on the multiple risks of displacement and rehabilitation needs to embrace the risk-reversal activities and plan for them such as from landlessness to land-based resettlement, from lack of employment to provision of employment, from compensation for house to house reconstruction in resettled colonies, from loss of common property resources to reconstruction of resources, and from social disarticulation to reestablishment of informal networking and social associations. These measures are vital safety nets for the reconceptualisation of the resettlement and rehabilitation process of the displaced communities in not only India but also similar countries where development-led displacement is occurring.

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