Involuntary Displacement: A Few Encounters

This paper discusses the rehabilitation and resettlement programmes for people affected by infrastructure and industrial projects in the country. It considers aspects such as intensity of involuntary displacement of people from their productive assets and its effects, induced urbanisation and the role of funding organisations and NGOs. It also looks at voluntary displacement, which has resulted in the depletion of large tracts of productive land.

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In recent years, one social issue that has caused intense debate among academics, social activists and planners is the involuntary displacement of people from their productive assets (particularly land) and homes, due to industrial or infrastructure projects. Though the process of acquisition of land for setting up mining, irrigation, transportation or mega-industrial projects (mostly in the public sector) is not new, the intensity of adverse effects was never comprehended in the past as it is today. The liberalisation of the economy, growing needs of infrastructure in fast-growing cities and new partnerships in industrial/economic sectors have threatened traditional sources of sustenance of people. More and more agricultural lands are being depleted for setting up industrial/infrastructure projects. The situation is aggravated due to major conversion of agricultural lands voluntarily or involuntarily into urbanisable lands. There is no authentic data to ascertain the loss of agricultural lands due to increasing urbanisation in the country.

All this has unleashed a situation where more and more people are being displaced from their communities and traditional ways of life. How many of them are co-opted into the new economic order and how many remain victims of the new model of development, remains unknown. However, there is a growing awareness of the sweeping powers of government, under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (now amended Act of 1984), which empowers it to acquire private lands or homesteads mainly under public interest. Growing social activism against such ‘sovereign domain’ of government is not only in response to untold hardships and miseries caused to the affected people but also a protest against the very model of development that alienates people from their traditional sources of sustenance.

In this context, the present paper highlights a few encounters of the author with such ‘rehabilitation and resettlement’ (R and R) projects for affected people under various infrastructure/industrial projects across the country. It focuses on aspects such as intensity of involuntary displacement; urbanisation and displacement; social costs of displacement; resettlement and rehabilitation and experiences of project-affected people (PAP); role of international funding organisations; and role of social scientists and NGOs. The paper uses data from various research projects on R and R with which the author has been associated in the past couple of years.

The paper highlights the fact that with the growing pace of development under ‘liberalisation’, the intensity of displacement has also increased. Unaccustomed to new ways of life, the affected people face a hostile situation where they have to compete as individuals, different from their community-based settings. Many lose out in this race for development. In recent years, social activism has brought them new hope and empowerment. However, preoccupied with campaigning against mega-projects, leading NGOs fight shy of getting involved with the tedious and long-drawn out process of rehabilitation of the project affected persons (PAPs). The paper also draws attention to the so-called ‘voluntary displacement’, which has resulted in the depletion of large areas of productive lands close to urban settlements throughout the country.

Intensity of Displacement

The past few decades have witnessed rapid economic growth in the country and the process forms a part of ‘planned development’. This is manifested in the setting up of large-scale projects in power generation, mining, industry, infrastructure development, irrigation and even in creating new urban settlements. This entails large-scale land acquisition and even demolition of homesteads. The project implementing agencies (PIAs), which used to be mostly public sector organisations in the past but have recently included the private sector in a big way, opt for compulsory acquisition of land or homestead mainly under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (and now, under the Amended Act of 1984).

The intensity of such land acquisitions has grown so high that many rural communities are threatened with separation from their traditional sources of livelihood and social networks. According to a report (Mid-Day, Mumbai, September 11, 1996) in the Dakshina Kannada region of Karnataka alone, the state government acquired 1,500 acres of land for the Konkan Railway, cleared 1,900 acres for Mangalore Refineries and Petrochemicals, 3,000 acres for a large industrial estate, 2,000 acres for the Nagarjuna Steel Plant, 1,200 acres for Cogentrix, 1,350 acres for the Usha Ispat plant and, 550 acres for Grasim Industries. This excludes government lands, both forest or waste lands.

In the Singrauli region (in the border area of south-east Uttar Pradesh and east Madhya Pradesh), over 40 villages were submerged for creating the Govind Sagar Reservoir in the early 1960s. With the discovery of coal mines in the area, the central government set up mega-thermal power projects which resulted in a fresh spate of displacement of more than 13,000 families [GHK/MRM 1993]. The process still continues. Two irrigation projects, namely, the Maharashtra Irrigation II in Satara district, and the Upper Krishna Irrigation Project in northern Karnataka, together resulted in the displacement of over 4,50,000 persons [Parasuraman 1999:55]. The Sardar Sarovar Project,
which has resulted in the mobilisation of the NGO sector throughout the country, affected about 297 villages and displaced over two lakh persons [ibid:55]. The agitation against this project by the Narmada Bachao Andolan has not only raised the issue of proper rehabilitation of PAPs but also the basic issue of development versus displacement.

Around Mumbai city, in the late 1960s, City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) plans affected more than 90 villages during the setting up of the Navi Mumbai township. Now the Maharashtra government proposes to take over lands of five villages for creating another mega city close to Navi Mumbai. Through the earnings from creating this new mega-city, the state government expects to finance another ongoing roadways project – the Mumbai-Pune super-express highway – which itself has displaced several hundred families.

According to another estimate [Fernandes and Thukral 1989: 80], over 14.5 million persons were directly affected by the setting up of various projects in the country during 1951-90. Of these, only 25 per cent of the people were rehabilitated. As several of these projects are set up close to resources, the hilly/forest lands, the tribals are their main target. The 29th report of the commissioner of scheduled castes and tribes (quoted in Kothari 1996) notes that even though tribal people are roughly 7.5 per cent of the population, over 40 per cent of those displaced till 1990 belonged to these communities.

The above data unmistakably brings out the fact that the growing pace of development has resulted in a situation where more and more families, mainly in rural areas, are getting separated from their productive assets and/or homesteads on account of infrastructure/industrial projects launched by public or private sector parties.

Urbanisation-Induced Displacement

Another important process that has been alienating people from their productive lands is the urbanisation of fringe areas of growing cities all around the country. In fact, urbanisation induced displacement is much larger in intensity than the ‘involuntary displacement’ caused due to setting up of industrial/infrastructure projects. However, it goes largely unnoticed except for stray reports in newspapers because much of the lands (converted into urbanisable lands) are sold out ‘voluntarily’ by the owners, or are ‘surrendered’ under threats from builders/mafia. In addition, many local governments declare green lands close to city boundaries as ‘urbanisable’ lands, which are then utilised by municipalities, housing boards or development authorities for urban use. In fact, several housing schemes undertaken by a development authority or a housing board in new ‘urbanisable’ zones remain incomplete or unattractive to potential beneficiaries due to the absence of adequate infrastructure. Or, such acquired lands remain unused or are encroached. The lands transferred by farmers to city dwellers lead to haphazard growth on the urban periphery and prove a challenge to planners in terms of providing basic amenities in such areas. For example, the unchecked growth of metropolitan cities like Bangalore, Pune or Kanpur.

An altogether different and questionable encroachment of green lands is by the builders in connivance with politicians. The Vasai-Virar region – a green hinterland of Mumbai, known as the lungs of Mumbai for its greenery – became the target of the builder-mafia. In connivance with politicians, they constructed hundreds of unauthorised buildings in the ‘green’ zone, and then influenced the politicians to declare overnight 8,000 ha of the coastal lands as ‘urbanisable lands’. Another 2,000 ha were added to this bonanza to builders by another notification of the government [Sharma 1991:413-18]. Another phenomenon that is not confined to Mumbai is the purchase of lands close to the national highways and in the vicinity of large cities. The Mumbai-Pune highway, Mysore-Bangalore highway, Delhi-Dehra Dun and Delhi-Kolkata highway are some of the routes along which lands are being purchased by the rich urban elite, real estate agents, owners of holiday resorts and motels. No doubt, a part of such lands may be used for growing trees, but they no more remain the lands for feeding the family of the average Indian farmer.

Thus the depletion of agricultural lands due to induced urbanisation is a distinct phenomenon which surpasses the effects of ‘involuntary displacement’ caused by infrastructure/industrial projects. However, there is no authentic data to gauge its intensity and also to know how much of such land is transferred voluntarily by farmers and how much is forcibly appropriated by interest groups. NGOs also do not show much interest in bringing out the dangerous effects of such fast depleting agricultural lands due to ‘induced urbanisation’. It is closely interlinked with the ‘model of development’ which separates people from their communities and traditional sources of sustenance.

Development vs Displacement

An intense debate is on about the implications of the present model of development to Indian society. Here, the model of development is broadly understood in terms of the technological and industrial interventions for ‘modernising’ Indian society similar to the western path of development. It includes recent trends in the ‘globalisation’ of national economies with the key role for ‘multinationals’ and international financial organisations. Though it is too early to assess the full impact of such processes, early visible trends point out disturbing happenings. Drawing lessons from economies like Brazil and Mexico, it is observed that such a model of development creates or adds to widespread inequalities in society, erodes traditional sources of livelihood, uproots people from their community way of life into atomised individuals pitted against each other in an opportunistic economic system, creates a consumer culture resulting in a depletion of natural resources, increases economic dependence on outside financial/technological organisations, and reduces political autonomy of the host society. Thus, non-sustainability of such a model of development, given the context of third world societal formulations, and conditioning of the social order to suit the economic order (the market economy), emerge as two implications with far-reaching consequences.

As this model of development necessitates the setting up of large industrial, infrastructural and related projects – mostly in locations close to the natural resources – it alienates people from their traditional sources of sustenance, such as lands, forests and village habitats. The products of these mega-projects rarely reach the affected people. Moreover, the displaced families hardly get fair treatment from the projects in terms of their resettlement and rehabilitation. They have no say in the legitimacy of setting up such projects as the government is empowered with legal rights in the name of ‘public interest’ to acquire their property and assets under the Land Acquisition Act. In 1994, the Supreme Court observed (quoted in Kothari 1996:1476-85)

The power to acquire private property for public use is an attribute of sovereignty and
is essential to the existence of a government. The power of eminent domain was recognised on the principle that the sovereign state can always acquire the property of a citizen for public good, without the owner’s consent. The right to acquire an interest in land compulsorily has assumed increasing importance as a result of requirement of such land more and more every day, for different public purpose and to implement the promises made by the framers of the Constitution of the people of India.

It is in this context that involuntary displacement is seen as an offshoot of the model of development and people have started questioning its legitimacy. Though the debate has been alive for long, it drew wide attention in the context of the Sardar Sarovar project. The Narmada Bachao Andolan mobilised thousands of affected families and like-minded people against the ‘anti-people’ stance of such large industrial/irrigation projects. The NGO not only focused on the inadequacy of R and R programmes but questioned the very basis of such projects executed by the government in the name of ‘public interest’. The issue is now being debated in a wider socio-political context. As observed by Kothari (op cit):

…the current patterns of economic development which have been constantly invoked to justify the forced eviction of people all over the country, are themselves incompatible with the goals of creating wider conditions of equity and social security. Further, these patterns have been equated with national progress where ‘public purpose’ and ‘national interest’ have been used interchangeably and based on the political premise that nation states are sacrosanct political entities and possess exclusive rights to political sovereignty and the power of eminent domain. The issue of displacement and resettlement has to be viewed within the broad question of distribution of power. Despite constitutional mandates and an emphasis on favouring the underprivileged, in an overwhelming number of cases, national and regional (and increasingly global) interest – the primary beneficiaries of the development process – transgress from or violate the interests of politically and economically weaker groups and individuals. In decisions on who should be displaced and what should be the treatment meted out to them, the more powerful interests have continued to prevail, especially when they have encountered poor and politically weak populations.

This contention of Kothari can be supported by several situations of forced evictions, which have brought misery and sufferings to the affected people. As narrated by several PAPs from the Singrauli area [GHK/ MRM 1993] though more than 40 villages were demolished for constructing the Govind Sagar dam, and many of these families were again evicted for setting up several super-thermal power and coal mining projects, all the products of these projects (coal, water from the lake or electricity) are still alien to the affected people. Thus the promised prosperity and ‘converting Singrauli area into another Kashmir’, as promised by political leaders, remained a great illusion to local people. The situation is not very different in other parts of the country.

The growing social activism against mega-projects has, however, blurred the distinction between a ‘right’ project and a ‘wrong’ one (against the common interests of the people). If one takes the stand that present development essentially promotes consumer culture within a capitalistic framework and is not suitable for a majority of 100 crore Indian people, most of the mega projects can be considered as ‘anti-people’. With the same logic, infrastructural projects requiring huge investments in large Indian cities essentially promote this model of development and therefore are questionable. Golf clubs, new airports, holiday resorts, metro raillinks, and ‘super’ national highways are a few such projects which are being opposed by social activists. The common man, however, struggling for survival, remains by and large ignorant of the ecological or equity dimensions of such mega-projects. Trapped into populist manoeuvres of their caste/religious leaders, millions of youth in the country desperately seek any kind of job that brings them a regular monthly income. This is also observed about the displaced persons. For instance, in a mining project in Orissa [Sharma 1998], a teacher-landlord from one of the affected villages was the main spokesperson of social activists opposing the project. His son, however, threatened to commit suicide if he was not allowed to join the training programme initiated by the project. Likewise, in a lignite mining project in Tamil Nadu [Sharma and Garain 1997] when we approached (for survey) a section of the villagers whose lands and homesteads were to be acquired for the mining expansion, the leaders of the village did not allow us to interview a section of the village families. They insisted that the lands and houses of all the villagers should be taken over by the government so that they could benefit by getting a spacious plot in the resettlement and a job (per family) in the project.

The politics of manipulations and growing opportunism have divided people into ‘interest groups’. Any talk of an alternative model of development has to confront this difficult situation.

Basic Issues in Land Acquisition

If a project has to take shape, the land acquisition results in a few basic issues. In the past, several public sector projects acquired lands much more in proportion than required. Such excess land remained unused or were utilised in creating spacious houses (with kitchen garden, etc) in project townships, while the dispossessed landowners went through untold hardships. In some projects, the uncertainty in actual land acquisition since its notification (under Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894), adds to the hardships of PAPs. In the case of the mining project in Tamil Nadu, while conducting baseline survey in a village, we confronted a house warming ceremony for a newly constructed ‘pucca’ house. When reminded about the possibility that the house may be demolished for underground mining, the owner stated that he had been listening to such ‘rumours’ for years and therefore decided to go ahead with the construction of the new house.

The situation in the case of Rihand superfine-thermal power project [Reddy et al 1997] (in the Singrauli region) proved to be different. The project, at one go, acquired land for its future expansion (phase II) also. However, for more than a decade, the acquired land for phase II was allowed to be used by the original owners. Recently, when the project decided to take back its land for expansion, the PAPs refused to surrender the land, resulting in agitations and litigations.

Gone are the days when the government used solely to decide the compensation rates to be paid towards the cost of land and other assets. Cidco in the Navi Mumbai area acquired land at the rate of 50 paise per sq ft (it now sells the developed land at the rate of Rs 300 to 500 per sq ft). In Singrauli, there were instances where for a fruit tree Rs 1.50 was paid as compensation. For a ‘pucca’ irrigation well, Rs 150 was paid. This situation has changed drastically today. Due to a growing awareness among the PAPs – mainly created by NGOs – about their rights and their realisation that it is going to be a life-time bargaining, they go for tough bargaining. So much so
that some privately owned projects (like the Mangalore power project) have gone out-of-court (legal provision for the award) for offering a generous compensation package to the PAPs. Even the government has to pay ‘adequate’ compensation, due to the hardened attitude of the PAPs.

The corruption in government departments (particularly the concerned revenue departments) also adds to the woes of displaced families. For instance, in the case of the mining project in Tamil Nadu (Sharma and Garain 1997), it was observed that over 1,500 cases by past PAPs were filed in court challenging the award (the compensation money paid for land/ homestead). When asked about the reasons for such a large number of litigations, it was informed by the PAPs that the revenue officials deliberately fixed varying values for similar kinds of house structures or even lands (irrigated/unirrigated, etc). Then they hinted to the PAPs to file cases for upward revision of compensation. This way the revised compensation money was shared by the officials, lawyers and the PAP.

Social Issues

Forced displacement also results in social costs which are hardly understood by concerned project officials, but are now being recorded by NGOs and social scientists while documenting their experiences. In a village setting, the productive land is a collective source of livelihood not only to its owners but also to the indirectly affected families like the agricultural labourers, village servants (carpenter, blacksmith, cobbler, and so on). The directly affected, as per the law, are entitled to compensation and other benefits as a part of resettlement and rehabilitation. However, the indirectly affected – depending on the owners’ lands – are left without any protection. Some of them get contractual jobs when the project is under the construction stage but no long-term rehabilitation measures are available to them.

The common property resources (grazing lands, fuel sources, ponds, wells, ‘sacred groves’, worshipping places, playgrounds) deplete or are lost if the village structures are to be demolished. In the urban context, PAPs lose their place of work (like hawking/vending, self-employment) if some infrastructural project results in their shifting to locations where such opportunities do not exist or take time to develop. Though in recent R and R efforts, concerned projects have paid attention to restoring common property resources, it does not happen everywhere. The importance of this aspect increases due to the fact that the marginalised (including the women) are the worst affected due to the loss of such collective resources.

The worst part of involuntary displacement is that the community networks which are built up over generations get disrupted if large-scale displacement occurs. Used to a traditional way of life, the PAPs are suddenly exposed to a new working and living environment which more often is hostile to them. In fact, from a collective way of living and earning, they turn into individuals competing for the gains of development (if any). Many lose out in the race. Those who gain are essentially those who belong to well-off sections of the community.

Equally important is the ‘conflict of interest’ which erupts within the family or the community. Disputes over compensation money emerge among family members. If preferences towards ethnic/caste groups are not considered while settling them in new settlements, it may develop inter-community hostility. In Singrauli area, it was observed that women had to spend money on cosmetics for their facelift, which they considered effective in getting casual jobs from contractors/NTPC officials. Losing self-esteem and growing dependence on welfare activities was another outcome of the post-displacement behaviour of affected families. Worst of all, many PAPs who were offered (contractual) manual jobs by project officials or contractors refused them due to their pride in being landowners. They found beneath their dignity to engage in such jobs. Overall, a majority of PAPs felt that the projects had turned them into ‘inferior’ citizens. In contrast, those few who were fortunate to get regular jobs in the projects considered it an enhancement in their social status.

Resettlement and Rehabilitation

A lot has been said on R and R through reports, seminars, surveys and documents. It need not be repeated here. Only a few salient points are stressed.

PAPs are not a uniform category. Prior to displacement, they were divided on social, economic and gender basis. Accordingly, post-displacement experiences also vary and are influenced by their pre-displacement statuses. Those with sizeable lands or educational/occupational skills and are younger are at a distinct advantage compared with the marginal farmers or unskilled labourers (mostly the SCs/STs). Those who succeed in converting their compensation money into productive assets (like operating a shop, tractor/trolley for contract work or purchasing land for land), in fact, gain from the displacement. The same holds true for those few lucky ones who get regular jobs in the project. The gainers are, in fact, the most vocal against the project. The ‘left out’ either wait indefinitely for a job and other benefits from the project, or become reconciled to their fate. Women, the aged and marginalised are the main sufferers and need priority in any rehabilitation programme. The concept ‘land for land’ is more rhetoric than reality. Either lands for sale in the market are not available or these are wastelands and need considerable investment for their development. The setting up of a mega-project in the area results in a sudden upsurge in land costs, making it difficult for the PAPs to purchase land in the open market. Often the compensation rates for lands are not the replicable costs in the market.

Getting a ‘regular job’ in the project remains the single most important factor influencing the whole process of R and R. For PAPs, the main demand (and aspiration) is a regular job in the project. Most projects being hi-tech do not have many low-skilled jobs to rehabilitate the PAPs. Those few jobs like health worker, gardener, canteen boy, security staff (in the project township) and sweeper are also not offered by projects on a regular basis, due to the recent trend of awarding such jobs on ‘contractual basis’ for reducing the overhead costs. This creates bitterness among the PAPs who consider the projects as ‘anti-PAPs’. The projects also avoid extending a firm commitment to PAPs about the quota of regular jobs to be awarded to PAPs. In fact, in Tamil Nadu mining project, it was observed that the personnel department ‘released’ a part of the quota of such jobs for the PAPs with a long time gap. When enquired, it was informed that such a strategy was ‘more effective’ in keeping the PAPs silently waiting for the jobs and also coping with the pressure from a senior minister who, during his visit, would insist on providing some jobs to the PAPs. Many manual jobs within the project township, as mentioned above, can be awarded to the PAPs (or their ‘cooperatives’), but due to lack of mutual faith between the PAPs and the project officials it does not happen. So much hatred in the earlier phase of land acquisition is generated between the two
that the officers tend to ‘settle scores’ with the ‘defiant’ PAPs and their leaders, once the land comes into their hands. In an NTPC project in Rajasthan [Sharma and Rath 1999], our field investigators (recruited from among the PAPs) were not allowed to enter the project township without a written permission from the security staff. Only when we threatened to withdraw from conducting the survey that permission was granted.

“Waiting for a regular job in the project”, in fact, brings about a total setback to any other effort by the project or NGOs for rehabilitating the PAPs. For each PAP (irrespective of education/skills or even age), getting such a job is a one-time opportunity and if it is missed, the person faces a life of misery and uncertainty. Harbouring such hopes, many PAPs spend their compensation money on non-productive activities. The result is that any other effort towards their rehabilitation, by creating self-employment opportunities, remain gestures without having any significant effect. Many PAPs deliberately avoid accepting any other benefit from the project, fearing that by doing so they would lose their turn of getting a regular job in the project.

Such an attitude of PAPs brings them untold hardships and sufferings. In the Singrauli region, we confronted PAPs who showed us copies of their job applications which were submitted to the project when they were young (in their mid-20s). During our contacts they had crossed the mid-30s but still hoped to get a regular job. This is precisely the challenge that keeps many NGOs away from taking up any rehabilitation work among the ‘left-out’ PAPs.

Due to this major constraint, creating alternative productive assets for PAPs on a sustainable basis remains the biggest challenge before the projects or NGOs. Many state governments and ongoing projects like mining or those of the NTPC have evolved their own R and R policies, which incorporate all possible components of a good R and R but rehabilitation remains as elusive as ever. Though some praiseworthy efforts are there, like labour cooperatives (formed by PAPs) getting projects from the Singrauli NTPC project or training in carpet weaving by the Rihand NTPC project, these are not enough to rehabilitate the affected families. Likewise, several skill upgradation and training programmes for the young are initiated by some projects, and the trained PAPs again expect the projects to provide them with regular jobs. The result is that the initial enthusiasm to train PAPs soon turns into a liability for the projects.

**Role of International Funding Organisations**

Though large funding organisations like the World Bank which finance mega-projects mainly in the public sector, are not directly concerned with the issue of displacement, they are made accountable by social activists. For them, it is the World Bank which has been playing a key role in promoting the present model of development in third world countries. It therefore cannot distance itself from this major human problem (involuntary displacement). The role of the World Bank came under scrutiny in the context of its funding large dams like the Sardar Sarovar Project. The promotion by the World Bank of the western model of development within a capitalistic framework should be related to the policies and political economies of the host countries, and is not under present focus. However, a few observations on its mitigating the ill-effects of funded mega-projects become relevant here. In response to continued protests by social activists, the World Bank has come out with its own R and R policy document [World Bank 1996]. It not only stresses adequate R and R of the affected persons but also seeks their ‘partnership’. In the process of development. No project (in India) funded by the World Bank has operationalised such a partnership. In fact, its scope is not even understood by the concerned projects. Only a few social activists have demanded such a partnership of PAPs in the form of sharing a small amount of royalty per tonne of the extracted minerals, in the case of a mining project, or offering the capital shares of the projects to PAPs. A few positive aspects of the policy of the World Bank on R and R are: making the R and R cost the in-built cost of the total project costs; reducing incidence of displacement to the extent possible; making an environmental (and social) impact assessment (EIA) of the project; restoring common property resources; land compensations to reflect market costs; exploring ‘land for land’ if feasible; focusing on project affected persons (PAPs); those indirectly affected also to be rehabilitated; and implementing an effective R and R with the joint partnership of PAPs, NGOs and social development experts in the area. Though many of these components are incorporated by World Bank-funded projects like the NTPC and National Coal Fields, when it comes to execution of R and R programmes, the results are usually disappointing. Only in the case of resettlements have the recent outcomes been better than in the past.

The issue of rehabilitation of relocated persons in case of urban infrastructure projects is more complicated. As observed by us in the ‘Institutional Strengthening Project’ [TCS and TISS 1997] for a good R and R under the Mumbai Urban Transportation Project II (MUTP-II), we found it baffling as to how more than one lakh families would be rehabilitated if the MUTP-II is executed. We found unconvincing the World Bank’s desire to create a competent private organisation to deal with the issue of rehabilitation. This is mainly because many components of R and R have implications for the government’s key role in the process. So far, the World Bank has not made up its mind to fund this project.

**Role of Social Scientists and NGOs**

Scholars like Cernea (1996: 1515-23) and Kothari (1996) have discussed the importance of social research in the area of development and displacement. While the emphasis of Kothari is more on examining the issue in the context of the wider political economy of the country, Cernea stresses more on the role expected from social scientists “to do much more to equip governments and public organisations with adequate practical and policy advice”. According to Cernea, “Involuntary population displacement and resettlement are frequent enough, big enough, complex and consequential enough, to merit the full mobilisation of the social science conceptual and operational tools available to address it.” He identifies a three-stage process to be taken up by social scientists – in research or serving government bodies as development planners. These are: to understand macro processes and local factors related to the development process; to formulate and recommend the basic principles and normative content of relevant policy; and to translate knowledge and principles into a vocabulary of procedures (for planning, reviewing, supervising and other process components) usable by government and other relevant organisations.

In contrast, Kothari feels the need for social scientists (and NGOs) to scrutinise the desirability and justifiability of the project development intervention itself. During the implementation phase, the need
is felt to examine issues like human rights violations during appropriation of assets, disruption of nomadic routes crucial to the survival of nomadic communities and alienating people from their basic assets of livelihood. Kothari also seeks the role of social scientists in post-settlement monitoring and evaluation in order to assess the trauma of displacement.

The role of NGOs in pre- and post-displacement periods deserves one or two observations. Our experience shows that leading NGOs concentrate more on questioning the legitimacy of the specific industrial or infrastructure project. This gives an edge to their ideological fervour. Once they take a stand against a project, they fight shy of entering into the task of implementing a good R and R – even if such opportunity is proposed by the project. The result is that there is an impressive record of NGOs campaigning against displacement in context of the present model of development. However, no well-established NGOs come forward to associate with R and R. Due to this, inexperienced local NGOs (if any) try to implement R and R (if given an opportunity by the project), or the fate of PAPs is left to project officials. The end result goes against the interest of PAPs.

**Conclusion**

This paper highlights the important social issue of involuntary displacement of people from their productive assets (particularly land) and homesteads, caused due to industrial or infrastructure projects in rural or urban areas. The growing pace of land acquisition has invited lot of attention of policy-makers, NGOs and social scientists for a sustainable urban development under ‘liberalisation’. NGOs are built while the original landowners struggle for a piece of land. ‘Land for Land’ remains more rhetoric than a reality. Though recently, with sustained interventions from NGOs, compensation for lands has been enhanced, often it remains short of replicable costs in the market. Corruption in the revenue departments of government add to the woes of PAPs.

Displacement results in high social costs which are not even comprehended. Community-based sustenance of people is disturbed, common property resources are eroded, marginalised sections of population (mainly women, SCs/STs and aged) suffer most, and community networks are broken. Cash compensation for lost assets leads to conflict of interest within the family members of PAPs. Planned resettlements overlook the caste/religious bonds while planning for new dwellings.

‘Unending aspirations of PAPs for regular jobs in the project’ emerge as the single most important factor affecting the whole R and R process. The effects of displacement are not uniform across the affected population. Those with better skills and large owned lands, in fact, gain from the project. The ‘left out’ are too vulnerable to present their cases for a better deal. The indirectly affected – landless labourers, artisans and village servants – are hardly protected under any R and R. Thus, the R and R of PAPs remain as elusive as ever. For this reason, it is not surprising that leading NGOs fight shy of taking up the work of R and R.

Recently, the role of international funding organisations, particularly the World Bank, has come under severe criticism due to its ‘facilitating’ such ‘anti-people’ development. In response, the World Bank puts pressure on the concerned governments not only for a comprehensive R and R policy but also making the PAPs partners in the process of development.

The issue of displacement has invited lot of attention from social scientists and NGOs, not only in portraying the sufferings of affected people but also debating the very rationale of setting up a mega-project. Development experts find a new role in planning (and implementing) a good R and R for the PAPs. Sensitising project officials to achieve such a goal is another relevant area open before the researchers and NGOs. The latter, so far, are confined to campaigning against the projects, with the result that rehabilitating the PAPs remains a big challenge.

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