

Book Reviews

Land Acquisition, Displace and Resettlement in Gujarat, 1917-2004. By Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar, Sage, 2009, Rs. 895.

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Land acquisition, displacement and rehabilitation and resettlement seem to be links in the chain of development-except that the third link is often deemed dispensable. Our knowledge of these links falls short in one respect: there is a dearth of reliable data in India about land acquired, number of people displaced or adversely affected by development projects and the extent of relief and rehabilitation. Even the National policy on Rehabilitation and Resettlement recognized this lacuna.

Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar's study therefore plugs a gap. It is a comprehensive study on the "three links of development" in a state often projected as the poster child of post-liberalization India.

The authors do not see development as a value-free term. They begin by asking: "whose development is being spoken of" They engage with questions pertaining to caste, class, gender and regional inequality. Lobo and Kumar's study covers 60 years and survey various development projects, including, water-related, transport and communication, industries, forest conservation, urbanization, road and building, defence and tourism. It is also important to credit the Right To Information Act (RTI) for a lot of this rigour. Lobo and Kumar gathered information through RTI petitions from 25 collectorates in Gujarat.

Much information was also gleaned through group discussions at 139 resettlement sites. The authors talked to people from more than 2,000 households displaced by projects. But they have over-looked people who have benefited for various projects.

It's clear the authors' sympathies are loaded towards the displaced. They comment: "Monetary compensation is largely dependent of the valuation by state agencies is dependent on the capacity, negotiation skills and the urgency of the project. Some farmers have been lucky enough to receive better monetary compensation in the case of industrial projects, while others have suffered."

The study should open discussions on the principles of public purpose. The principle is always invoked to acquire land, but the statistics ferreted out by Lobo and Kumar show the principle works against dalits, tribals, the poor and women.

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