

Book Reviews

Lancy Lobo and Shashikant Kumar: Land acquisition, displacement and resettlement in Gujarat, 1947-2004, New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2009, xxiii + 304 pp., Rs 895 (hb). ISBN 978-81-7829-938-9..

The volume under review is part of an all-India study on compilations of data on development-induced displacement in different states. Displacement induced by economic growth and rehabilitation has been a serious concern for all developing countries, and more so in India. Every year, according to the World Bank estimates, dams, highways, ports, power projects, urban improvements, mines, pipelines, petrochemical plants, and other such industrial development projects globally displace about 10 million people. In India alone, during the last five decades, involuntary resettlement is estimated to have affected about 50 million people, particularly, tribal and rural. With the liberalisation of the economy more and more private fund is flowing into large-scale infrastructure development in India, and hence more people are continuously getting displaced. Three-fourths of those displaced in India still face an uncertain future. However, till date, no authentic data is available on the displaced people under numerous public and private developmental projects.

Traditionally, little thought went into addressing the factors that limit the benefits available to project-affected families, making a series of rehabilitation action plans unsustainable in the long run. The vast literature generated over recent decades on displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation issues in the country has largely focused on recording the detrimental social, cultural, and economic consequences development projects have had on the lives of local project-affected families. This literature has been useful in identifying systemic problems underpinning resettlement and rehabilitation. Worldwide, resettlement experience shows that the single most factor damaging the quality and outcomes of resettlement is the absence in many countries, including India, of policy and legal frameworks that define the rights and entitlements of people affected by development-related, state-imposed displacements. The existing law gives very little opportunity to the affected party to challenge the process of acquisition or even to demand fair compensation and rehabilitation.

The authors of this volume have painstakingly gathered data from various research centres, universities, government departments/project authorities, ministries and government gazettes on all the developmental projects in Gujarat and analyzed the impact of displacement and deprivation on various strata of society. The information presented covers 139 sites and 1,937 households from

different parts of the state over a period of 60 years (from 1947 to 2004). The study also included a sample survey of project-affected households, with special reference to tribal people, dalits, and Other Backward Castes to learn the conditions of the displaced people in the new locations.

The authors - one an active sociologist and the other an expert in the field of urban and regional planning (under the guidance Walter Fernandes, a senior subject expert) - see development-induced displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation not just from the academic point of view. They address the issue of public policies related to land acquisition, resettlement, and rehabilitation as well. They also touch upon the trends in land acquisition and transfer in the state by referring to the Government of Gujarat Special Economic Zone Act, 2004. They suggest that there is an urgent need to create a people-centric developmental model, where people who have given up their land and their livelihoods could be made the immediate beneficiaries of the project. It is a model that recognises rehabilitation and resettlement with the active participation of affected persons, rather than as an externally imposed requirement. It should also ensure that the actual Rehabilitation Action Plan would be developed and implemented with an active collaboration of all the principal stakeholders, that is, the government, the project authority/company and the affected community through an open dialogue and a transparent two-way communication process.

Of late, growing public concern over the long-term consequences for project-affected people is resulting in greater public scrutiny of the rehabilitation and resettlement process, particularly for large development projects. Whether as a result of increased public scrutiny on the social responsibility of corporate houses, or a pragmatic recognition of the time and cost overrun implications of a badly conceived rehabilitation strategy, an increasing number of industrial ventures as well as several state governments have been paying greater attention to developing a more robust rehabilitation strategy for project-affected families, and have committed to spending substantial sums of money on the rehabilitation process. Many states in India now have a forward-looking Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Policy in place (for example, Orissa R&R Policy, 2006; Jharkhand R&R Policy, 2008; Arunachal Pradesh R&R Policy, 2008). It is also worth mentioning here that there are two important Bills pending before Parliament: Bill No. 98 of 2007 - The Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2007, and Bill No. 97 of 2007 - The Land Acquisition (Amendment) Bill, 2007. Once these Bills are passed by Parliament and notified in the gazette, the displaced persons would be empowered to demand their resettlement and rehabilitation as per its provisions and seek its enforcement in the court if the government fails to meet its commitment.

This book is a welcome addition to the existing literature on land acquisition, displacement, and rehabilitation.

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