

## **India's internal displacement: causes, safeguards, and challenges**

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### **Abstract**

Throughout the history communities thrived when people founded strong political organization based on cultural, family and community values. We have killed and destroyed societies despite our intentions even in the name of progress. This might have been because of focusing on the human needs only at the macro-system level and not also focusing on the direct implications of the policies on the lives of people themselves. This is at the cost of suppressing the voice of the voiceless by employing statistics and program language. The given essay is aimed at analyzing the impact of human displacement on the social and economic well-being of people at a personal level. Two issues are highlighted: Human trafficking, forced migration and housing displacement caused by redevelopment of urban areas, gentrification and the restrictive property covenants.

**Keywords:** Displacement, Progress, migration, Disaster, Globalization, Rehabilitation.

### **Introduction**

India has not created the number of refugees given her track-record of bloodshed. Nevertheless, the internal displacement caused by the war, violence, human right violation, and forced movement is very high. The number of internally displaced population in India is hard to estimate. Regular monitoring cannot be provided in such a big country where no central entity exists to integrate the data between the federal and state government. Tracking and recording of the causes of internal displacement in India would be an immense task because of the broad changes in the nature, frequency, and magnitude. Information about the exact type of relocation and extent cannot be compromised because of the political apprehensions at the state level. Consequently, the estimates of the IDPs in India have wide ranges of estimates. The latest World Refugee Survey lists 507,000 internally displaced people (IDP) in India; the Indian Social Institute in Delhi estimates 21.3 million (mostly the result of natural displacement by development); and the Global DIP Project lists 3.9 million (the result of internal displacement by war). Political and developmental concerns of the government have led to most of the events where people have been displaced either willingly or unwillingly. Displacement as a result of

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development has been preminent in the IDP situation in India. Among new causative variables are appearing rapidly as well as displacement occasioned by growth. The destructured conflicts or the low intensity wars that took place in South Asia since the post-cold war period have traditionally led to displacement of population contrary to the global scenario of the Cold war period where military conflicts caused by power rivalry of major powers were the most prevalent.

### **There are four main types of displacement in India-**

#### **I Political factors, such as movements for secession**

i) Two major violent campaigns have taken place in northeastern India since independence, including the Naga movement, which was steered by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, and the Assam movement, which is now controlled by the radical group United Liberation Front of Assam which was led by the All Assam Students Union. The flow of displaced individuals continues to flow continuously due to all forms of brutality by the government as well as retaliation measures by other anti-secessionist factions.

ii) Kashmiri Pandits were killed by fundamentalist secessionist groups, brought about systematic chaos by political unrest and constant violation of fundamental human rights by the state and militant groups in Kashmir due to its war between militants and the state. The continued fact of intermittent atrocities in Kashmir has also made people displaced unable to come back, despite democratic administration being voted and restored in 1996. The displaced find out that camps offer better job, learning, and security options in spite of the wretched conditions.

#### **II Autonomy movements based on identity**

Identity-based autonomy movements have also led to violence and migration such as Bodoland, Punjab, Gorkhaland and Ladakh. This has happened in Punjab, and lately in the Bodo Autonomous Council region, in western Assam. The Bodos have caused many non-Bodos to flee due to their cleaning up of non-Bido villages by looting, burning, massacres, and persecuting them. Presently, they live in camps.

#### **III Localized aggression**

Caste conflicts (as in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), religious fundamentalism (as in urban riots in Bombay, Coimbatore, Bhagalpur and Aligarh) and violent deprivation of residency and job

opportunities to non-indigenous populations by adherents of the son-of-the-soil policy (as in Meghalaya by the Khasi students and in Arunachal Pradesh against the Chakmas).

#### **IV Displacement brought on by the environment and development**

India has also made the investments in industrial projects, dams, highways, mines, power plants, and new cities to realize rapid expansion of the economy. Such projects could only be possible due to the large purchase of land and the resultant population resettlement by the country. According to the Indian Social Institute data, among the 21.3 million IDPs that are attributed to development, there are dams (16.4 million), mines (2.55 million), industrial development (1.25 million), and national parks and wildlife sanctuaries (0.6 million).

#### **Development projects**

Since they are normally one of the main sources of issues that concern relocation, development projects including dams, have long been a highly contested issue in India. Estimates showed that of the 18.5 million persons displaced in the country due to construction activities between 1950 and 1990, over 3,300 dams have been built and 1000 more are currently under development, according to estimates by Central Water Commission. In another study of 54 large dams, an average of 44,182 individuals have been displaced by the big dam, which has been the result of another research carried out by the Indian Institute of Public Administration. In the case of Pong dam construction approximately 25 years ago, over 21000 households were displaced and they have not yet been enjoying any form of proper rehabilitation. The controversial nature of the Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada that will potentially dislocate 0.2 million people has cast a dark cloud on the future of the project by the World Bank in the form of its Project Completion Report. The study explains the ambiguity by the fact that India has had poor performance in its areas of operations and maintenance. In building the dam, India obtained a loan of US151.5 million as a loan facility of the World Bank. The Bank canceled further lent plans in 1993 because the Indian government could not even meet the most fundamental requirements, including identifying the displaced and making them relocation plans. The displaced are usually the indigenous folk, who have been historically the conservation agents, since development projects are usually located in isolated communities, hills, and woods. Relocation in this instance has led to social instability and predicament, deprivation of property, means of living and place,

and disconnection with an ecosystem that has benefited them. Above all, these displacements expose the poor and the weak to a higher level of poverty. The few examples of resettlement that can be considered as involuntary, but do lead to some form of governmental intervention, are those that are highlighted by social and environmental activists. In the majority of cases, it has resulted in total displacement and lack of a place to live as well as loss of livelihood. The current Act of 1894, Land Acquisition, focusing on monetary compensation in loss as opposed to rehabilitation which is in essence building livelihood of people who are displaced, oversimplifies the complex issue of rehabilitation and its importance to note. The government has a clear view on the meaning of the definition of rehabilitation and it would not feature anywhere on the list as the land is bought under the public purpose category (the definition of which remains unpublished). The government has gone even further by appointing the Supreme Court as the sole court of appeal so as to deprive even those whose land is about to be taken, the opportunity of appealing. The other danger brought by globalization to indigenous world is the encroachment of the privates like conglomerates, mostly foreign multi-national corporations into the rural communities which have historically belonged to the tribal celebrities as well as other indigenous people to build the industrial infrastructure desired by the government. By introducing the revisions that were planned in the 1894 Act, the concerns of the private interests buying property would become much easier and this would lead to more waves of relocation.

### **Displacement brought on by natural disasters**

Frequent relocation has been caused by floods and cyclones in addition to landslides. India suffers the greatest effect by flooding in the world with a 1991 assessment by the Centre for Science and Environment estimating it to be the second global less only to Bangladesh and that over 30 million evacuated every year. The mean yearly area affected by floods has risen since 6.4 million hectares in 1950s to 9 million hectares in 1980s. The government has embankments and dams as the major types of flood control. Embankments of over 400 km have been constructed in each year since 1954. The number of big dams, 256 completed by 1986 with an average height of 15 meters or above, and 154 still in development, reached to 410. Not even them have managed to stop floods, as a matter of fact, dams are currently seen as a major contributing factor to floods and embankments have disrupted the natural drainage system within the flood plains. The fact,

that the relocation of this category is silent yet strong and constant, is one of its most serious characteristics.

### **Institutional responses**

India does not have a national policy and legal institutional framework to deal with refugees or internally displaced individuals. India does not permit access to UNHCR to most groups of refugees and has not authorized the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. The political authorities have identified at their own will that refugee status is given without any long-term institutional basis to coordinate refugee issues. At the project and state level there have been sporadic and ad hoc attempts at the project level because of the similar lack of a national policy on the relocation and rehabilitation of the IDPs. The latest Draft National Policy on Rehabilitation of Persons: Displaced as a Consequence of the Acquisition of Land by the Ministry of Rural Development only considers displacement as a result of the acquisition of land. This is also an indication that the predicament and interests of IDPs of other classes i.e. those who escape physical violence, human rights violations among others that are causes of conflict are also in total disregard in this draft. Notably, minimal accountability of the impact of state-imposed relocation by the government has been witnessed. The states have been aggressively seeking additional benefits to development endeavors but have persistently wrangled over their share of the capital used on rehabilitation but they have totally neglected the plight of those who have been displaced. The Draft National Policy on Rehabilitation is a complicated framework of displacement comprising of comprehensive rehabilitation of i) all community members (landless workers, land owners, the homeless, householders, unemployed and forest residents), ii) their sociocultural cost of displacement, and iii) the economic aspects such as enhancement of skills and amassing of material/social capital. The Draft is however being discussed by Parliament.

Any international organization cannot deal with such relocation. The mission of UNHCR has in this regard been uncoordinated and haphazard. It is only in the recent past that UNHCR has redefined its mandate to allow internally displaced people (IDP) to be included under some conditions: when they are living in or moving into same territories as the returning refugees; when they coexist with a refugee population and share similar needs of protection and support; when the same causes have given rise to both internal and external population flows and there are some good reasons to meet both needs with a common humanitarian operation; when there is a

possibility of cross-border movement; and when providing aid to the internally displaced may allow them to stay safe in their home country.

### **Prospective situation**

The IDP problems of India are not seen to have a quick solution. This may be because of several factors including:

- i) the complexity and intricacies of the situations which compel them to leave behind their places of work;
- ii) the low ranking of both the federal government and the state governments over the issue of IDP/refugees;
- iii) withdrawal syndrome exhibited by the civil society and other interest and pressure groups
- iv) the absence of clear cut policies, national legal tools and institutions that can address both pre and post displacement situations.

There is risk of increased displacement becoming highly complex unless the Indian government pays much attention to the various alternatives of addressing the causes. State accountability is an issue that cannot be overemphasized.

There is a need to take action so as to:

- No matter the nature of the conflict, reduce the level of violence against the civilian population.
- Resolve potential and existing ethnic conflicts.
- Minimize non ethnic rifts within society.
- Avoid coercive means and ensure that the measures and actions of the international front are not corrective but preventative.
- Take human needs and sustainable development into account during assessment of the development initiatives.
- Ensure that individuals displaced are resettled and rehabilitated promptly.
- Implement national laws and regulations to deal with multidimensionality of the IDP groups.

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