



Development and Conservation: Understanding Rehabilitation, Natural Resource Protection and Rehabilitation Packages

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the post-independence period, India has sought rapid economic growth through 'planned development'. This has entailed large-scale investments in dams, roads, mines, power plants, industrial estates, new cities and other projects involving land acquisition. Large numbers of people have been displaced from their original habitats to make way for these development projects. The Sardar Sarovar Project, the Silent Valley Power Project (in Kerala), the Mangalore Thermal Power Project, the Dabhol Power Project, the Maha Mumbai Special Economic Zone (MMSEZ), the Nandigram SEZ Project, the Singur Tata Motors Project and the Utkal Alumina Project are such projects which resulted in loss of livelihood and displacement of the respective communities. There have been many more such projects across India. In many cases, however, the project affected people seem to be in an advantageous position with project managements competing to offer them better rehabilitation and resettlement packages. These rehabilitation and resettlement programmes for people affected by infrastructure and industrial projects have caused intense debate among academics, social activists and planners (Sharma and Shashi). It is a noteworthy fact that research on evaluation of rehabilitation policies has generally relied on industrial and infrastructure projects and very scant material is available on conservation induced rehabilitation policy. The present study is a step towards addressing this problem, and takes forward the debate on rehabilitation policy as an outcome of natural resources protection.

Conservation of natural resources is an area of special focus in almost every zone of the world. This paradigm has had significant implications for communities that derive their sustenance from designated conserved areas. Large numbers of people have been dislocated from their original habitats to make way for the conservation of natural resources and other allied programmes. People dependent upon the land, water and other natural resources have been dispossessed of their sources of subsistence through resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R). Thus, on the one hand, environmental protection is increasingly taking recourse to resettlement as a tool for safeguarding natural resources from the human pressure and this method is strongly supported by many conservationists and wildlife biologists. On the other hand, supporters of movements for social justice and rights of marginalized communities have been emphasizing the destitution that such conservation-induced resettlement wreaks on the affected communities (Kabra 2003). A major lacuna in this discourse is that there is still a lack of



specific literature regarding the socio-economic consequences of rehabilitation. Understanding this phenomenon, where the beneficiaries from any rehabilitation programmes are kept at the centre of attention, will help in achieving a win-win situation for the policy makers. The present study is a step towards addressing this lacuna and examines various livelihood strategies that any conservation induced rehabilitation package should cover. The paper is organized as follows, the first part discusses the role of natural resources in providing sustainable livelihood. The second part presents an overview of how rehabilitation is used as a tool to conserve natural resources from being deteriorated. Finally, the paper discusses some of the important determinants that should be included in an efficient rehabilitation program.

II.ROLE OF NATURAL RESOURCE IN PROVIDING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

As far as the term 'livelihood' is concerned, it comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. Subsequently, 'Sustainable livelihood' is commonly defined as the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both at present and in the future, while at the same time not undermining the natural resource base (Carney, 1998). The literature and research on sustainable livelihood gained momentum in the later parts of nineteenth century when the concept was introduced as one of the important global agenda viz.: The Brundtland Commission and the first UNDP Human Development Report. The real breakthrough in sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) was seen when the works of Amartya Sen- in relation to capabilities- were included in the concept of sustainability, for which social as well as environmental dimensions have been emphasized. Again, recent studies on SLA give significant attention to incorporating various factors in any developmental framework. These factors include *enhancing capability* - in facing change and unpredictability, people are versatile, quick to adapt and able to exploit diverse resources and opportunities, *improving equities* - priority should be given to the capabilities, assets and access of the poorer, including minorities and women, and *Increasing social sustainability*- the vulnerability of the poor should be minimized by reducing external stress and shocks and providing safety nets (Chambers and Conway, 1992). In this way, SLA facilitates the man-environment relationship that influences the outcome of livelihood strategies. It lays stress on the basic potential of mankind in terms of their skills, social networks, access to physical and financial resources, and ability to influence core institutions.

In the recent past, natural resource management has gained significant attention both nationally as well as internationally. Natural resources play an important role in supporting livelihood opportunity of local population. Proper production of livelihood is not only the mainstay of any economic unit but also the basis for many social and economic relations, networks and institutions. Natural resources are thus linked not only to economic development but also to peace and prosperity of contemporary economies. It is a significant fact that a high proportion of world's population derives their livelihood from exploiting natural resource base. This includes not only agricultural resources but also forest resources, wildlife, fishing etc. Natural resources thus provide opportunities for income generation through jobs and small enterprises (e.g., in forestry, tourism and wildlife trade). Nevertheless, it's not only people from low income groups that derive their sustenance from



natural resources – food, medicine, ecosystem services etc – but a significant proportion of population, whose mainstay is either industries or services sector, are directly or indirectly benefited by natural resource as a basic raw material. In this way, natural resource base is considered to be central for the achievement of sustainable development.

However, the contemporary world economy is facing the challenge of over exploitation in the overall natural resource base. In recent past, there has been a significant loss of natural resource base and ecosystem services resulting in the degradation of environment. Most researchers believe that public good nature of these resource is the main reason for the existence of market failure and hence their degradation. Subsequently, many environmentalist opine that, it is the people residing in the nearby areas of any natural resource site who continuously put an over exerting pressure on these resources. Thus, these areas should be designated as protected areas and kept away from the reach of local populace. Regardless of these facts, a number of programmes have been introduced to protect natural resource from deterioration. One such attempt is the resettlement of local communities from the designated protected areas in order to reduce the over-exploitation of natural resource.

III. REHABILITATION AS A TOOL TO CONSERVE OF NATURAL RESOURCE

The rapid deterioration and decline of common property resources like forests, grazing lands, and water has raised a debate about various ways and means that can culminate into the mitigation of environmental degradation. One such method proposed by many environmentalists is to reduce the human dependence- which is believed to be the main cause of natural resource debasement- on these respective resources. This has entailed large scale displacement of indigenous people from their original habitats, to make way for conservation of natural resources. Such programmes have also permanently changed the pattern of use of land, water and other resources that previously prevailed in these areas. Subsequently, displacement of these local people also results in the dispossession of their sources of subsistence- land, forest and other resources (Goyal, 1996).

In this regard, resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) of local population from the areas notified for conservation, is regarded as an important tool to reduce the human pressure and thus safeguard the natural resource base. Rehabilitation programme should be seen as an opportunity to strengthen and revitalize the livelihood of nearby communities. Thus, the focus of rehabilitation efforts should be on rebuilding of economic basis of livelihood rather than on physical reconstruction and on giving the dependent people various skills and resources that can minimize the cost of recovery. However, the success and failure of any rehabilitation programme depends upon its impacts on the welfare of the dependent communities. As far as the socio – economic impact of rehabilitation is concerned, it is believed that there exists a transition from a predominantly non-monetised economy to a money-dominated one, and from relatively isolated cultural existence to one in which other cultures start imposing themselves (Pomeroy et al., 2006). Thus, an adequate rehabilitation program is the one which adheres to social justice and equity norms, and respect for civil rights and peoples entitlements should remain paramount. However, the conventional planning approach that causes many to displace and allow few to be rehabilitated has failed to achieve equal rights and entitlements of people. Nevertheless, it is an



accepted fact that relocation of indigenous communities is unavoidable and therefore various ways to reduce the hazards of displacement should be adopted. Many a times, these indigenous people despite valuing their culture, places of worship, the sanctity of their habitat etc don't oppose a particular resettlement and rehabilitation programme out rightly. However, their dissatisfaction is with what has been given to them in return for making way to the rehabilitation programme. Thus these R&R issues need to be taken far more seriously than they have been in the past. A standard rehabilitation program is the one which is part and parcel of its respective conservation drive. The two cannot be considered separately rather both complement each other by collectively bargaining between displaced persons and project beneficiaries. The central theme of this approach is that any rehabilitation drive should provide a resettlement package which promotes or at least protects the standard of living of displaced people and persuade them that the resettlement is in their interest (Goyal 1996)

IV. REHABILITATION PACKAGES – MEETING THE BASIC NEEDS

The reviewed literature reveals that a wide variety of studies concerning the evaluation of rehabilitation policies have been undertaken both nationally as well as internationally. However, the studies where the main focus is on the beneficiaries of these rehabilitation packages are very limited. In this connection, the present section will find out various livelihoods related factors that any adequate rehabilitation package should constitute.

The projects causing resettlement are usually justified by planners on the grounds that they provide benefits to a large number of people. However, they tend to ignore or overlook the short-term and, often, even the long-term consequences, such as loss of productive assets, dismantling of social networks, destruction of ancestral property and deteriorating health care system in some instances (Parasuraman, 1988). Subsequently, many authors emphasize that it is imperative to redress the inequities caused by resettlement in order to enable affected people to share in the benefits of growth on both economic and moral grounds. This can be done by allocating project resources and preventing the risks of impoverishments based on a significant 'equity compass'. Such equity can be achieved by including some of the important components - landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity, loss of access to common property resources- in any rehabilitation package (Cernea, 2000). Furthermore, while framing the resettlement and rehabilitation measures, it is not sufficient to just preserve the pre-project standard of living of people. Any comprehensive rehabilitation process should be the development of affected people on a sustainable basis rather than concentration on mere relief and meagre welfare activities. The displaced are often enmeshed in social networks which play a significant economic role in their total livelihood. Social networks are important means of exchange of goods (food, tools, etc.) and services (e.g. exchange labour). Any attempt at restoring, and perhaps improving, the pre-project standard of living will have to compensate for these losses with similar or alternative opportunities (Mahapatra, 1994). Therefore, we may conclude that an adequate and appropriate resettlement and rehabilitation programme is not only a matter of restoring incomes (or replacing livelihoods), as emphasised by World Bank policy on resettlement and rehabilitation. Fulfilment of basic needs is important and the provision of public services (health care facilities, sanitation, water, electricity, educational facilities, etc.) should be a significant component of rehabilitation packages aimed at restoring at least a minimum



standard-of-living. Indeed, it is an accepted fact that affected people consider the provision of public services important (Goyal et al, 1996).

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