

KUNO NATIONAL PARK: DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT

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Abstract: Instead we attempt to assess efficacy of displacement as a tool for conservation using as a case study the experience of population displacement from a wildlife protected area in central India – the Kuno National park in the state of Madhya Pradesh. We attempt to examine, through the lens of the displacement experience of Kuno national park, whether an adequate attempt is being made to reconcile these two imperatives. We argue that displacement can be considered a sustainable and ethically tenable tool for conservation only if it fulfils these two imperatives simultaneously. We hope to show, using the Kuno experience that so far, population displacements from protected areas (PAs) in India have been undertaken without basic understanding of and preparedness for handling the complex tasks at hand, and have been implemented without adequate attention to restoring lost livelihoods of the resident people. This indicates that successful and adequate rehabilitation of PA dependent communities is unlikely to happen in India in the near future, unless significant changes can be made to the policies and practices governing displacement. Without such changes, displacement will continue to be a highly contentious conservation tool, which will, to the detriment of conservation goals, serve to sharpen already serious human-wildlife conflicts.

Keywords: - *resettlement, displacement, chronology, relocation, rehabilitation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The designation of wildlife protected areas (national parks and sanctuaries) has been the principal conservation strategy adopted in most parts of the world, including India. The Hailey National Park, Later renamed as Corbett National Park was the first protected area designated in 1936. Protected areas (PA's) were meant to create spaces free of human interference where evolutionary processes could carry on uninterrupted and where the needs of biodiversity conservation would be prioritised over human needs. The Wildlife Protection Act promulgated in 1972 and amended in 1991, provided an umbrella under which such protected areas could be designated. Prior to this Act, various states designated protected areas under respective state Acts, as was the case with the Hailey National Park[2].

This conservation paradigm has had significant implications for communities that derive their sustenance from areas that have been designated as protected as also for the conservation of such areas. Firstly, restrictions have been placed on resource use from such areas.[4] Apart from such restrictions, there have also been instances of people being asked to vacate areas that they had inhabited and that had been designated subsequently as PA's. According to a survey of national parks and sanctuaries carried out by the IIPA in 1999-2002, 21 of the 30 PAs (70 per cent) that responded to a question on displacement, stated that people had been relocated from their PA.

Present data describes an ongoing resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) exercise in the Kuno national park in Madhya Pradesh in terms of the rehabilitation package offered and the process of R&R.[6] It also discusses some of the impacts that the displacement has had on the lives of the community in question. Finally, the implications of such relocation attempts for wildlife conservation are discussed.

2. BACKGROUND OF DISPLACEMENT FROM KUNO

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), upon the recommendation of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) took up an ambitious project to translocate a pride of Asiatic lions from the Gir National Park in Gujarat to the Kuno National Park in MP. Through this project it is hoped to establish a second free-ranging population of Asiatic lions, which would serve as insurance against various extinction threats that the Gir lions face. Kuno was part of the area chosen for the first-ever lion introduction in India, in the early 20th century by the erstwhile Maharaja of Gwalior. The experiment failed as the lions and their offspring attacked cattle as well as people and migrated far away from the target habitat. However, the lions for this experiment were imported from Africa and the desirability of such introductions is highly debatable[7].

The MP forest department is executing the current translocation project for Kuno National Park with financial assistance from the MoEF at the centre. According to the WII, the proper resettlement and rehabilitation of the people living inside the Kuno National Park was a precondition for introduction of lions into the sanctuary. This was considered vital for minimizing the probability of conflicts in the form of cattle depredation and attacks on human beings) between a large predatory carnivore like the lion and the local people. Predation on domestic cattle is a persistent feature of large carnivore-human interactions in many parts of India (Madhusudan and Mishra in Saberwal and Rangarajan, 2003), and the recommendations of the WII were aimed at avoiding or minimizing a repeat of failures of lion relocation in the past. The following account of R&R efforts in Kuno National Park is based on long-term research and village-level interventions by the Samrakshan Trust, a Delhi-based organization.

3. THE AREA AND PEOPLE AFFECTED

Kuno National Park is located in the Sheopur district in the northwestern Madhya Pradesh. The state of Madhya Pradesh was created on November 1956 as a result of the redrawing of the federal map of India on a linguistic basis. The provisional census data 2011 widens the state of Madhya Pradesh into revenue divisions, 52 districts, 333 tehsil or sub divisions 31 community development blocks 55393 villages and 294 urban centres. Before the creation of the new state of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh was the largest state in India, with an area of 443,436 sq. km.

Displacement and Resettlement The Wildlife Institute of India, in its report identifying Kuno as the second home for the Asiatic lion, recommended relocation of the villages in order to:

- I. Reduce the probability of conflict of villagers with a mega carnivore like the lion
- II. Provide a habitat free of humans that would permit numbers of wild herbivores to regenerate and boost the prey base for wild lions.

Accordingly, the MP forest department (MPFD), with financial support from the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), undertook to shift the village's resident in the sanctuary to a location on its north eastern periphery. A brief chronology of the displacement process is presented below:

Table 1: Time Line of Relocation under the Lion Reintroduction Programme

| S. No. | Description of Activity | Year |
|--------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Formulation of the relocation plan initiated by the Kuno sanctuary management | 1995 |
| 2. | Visit by a sub-committee of the state Cabinet to assess whether villagers were willing to shift out voluntarily | 1996 |
| 3. | Pre-relocation activities like compilation of list of beneficiaries, identification of land for resettlement, steps for de-notification of identified land from forest to revenue | 1997-98 |
| 4. | The first two villages, Khallai and Barrer shifted out to the relocation site | 1998 (summer) |
| 5. | Villages located on the western bank of river Kuno shifted out | 1998-99 |
| 6. | Most villages located on the eastern bank of river Kuno shifted out gradually | 1999-2002 |
| 7. | The last village left inside the sanctuary (Parond) shifted out to the relocation site | 2003 summer |

4. THE REHABILITATION PACKAGE

Rehabilitation of the people displaced from Kuno was carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Beneficiary Oriented Scheme for Tribal Development (BOTD) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of India. As part of this package, every male above the age of 18 years is considered a separate family and is entitled to services worth Rupees 100,000 (Rs. 1 lakh), as described in Table 2. The package adopted for Kuno is a significant improvement over many other relocation packages adopted so far in various relocation projects across the country. It does not suffer from the obvious lacunae of "land for land" type compensation packages, which have had a history of marginalizing the most vulnerable strata of rural society, particularly the landless (Fernandez *et al* 1989). It has been found that at the ground level, many of these problems have been addressed through suitable modifications and inclusions in the list of displaced families to include eligible families.

5. IMPACT ON PEOPLES LIVELIHOOD

Due to the close involvement of the authors (as part of the team at Sanrakshan Trust) with the process of rehabilitating the people displaced from Kuno, it has been possible to observe and record in detail the impact of displacement on livelihood of the affected people. While it is fairly well recognized now that involuntary displacement affects not just the economic well being of a community but also non-material and often non-quantifiable factors like identity, culture, social fabric and institutions, this present paper limits itself to commenting on impact on livelihood of the displaced population. Livelihood impacts of displacement can be assessed in terms of a number of parameters including asset-holding (mainly in terms of land), agriculture, access to common property resources (including NTFP, fuel-wood and fodder), livestock and wage employment opportunities.

The impact of relocation on each of these parameters is elucidated upon in order to arrive at some general conclusions regarding the efficacy of the resettlement and rehabilitation exercise.

Table 2: Rehabilitation Package under the Beneficiary Oriented Scheme for Tribal Development, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India

| S. No | Heads | Specified norms (Rs. per family) | To be spent by |
|--------------|--|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Land Development (for 2 hectares per family) | 36,000 | Forest dept. |
| 2 | House construction (on 5,000 sq. feet per house) | 36,000 | Displaced family |
| 3 | Community facilities | 9,000 | Forest department |
| 4 | Fuel and fodder plantation | 8,000 | Forest department |
| 5 | Pasture development | 8,000 | Forest department |
| 6 | Transport of household goods | 1,000 | Displaced family |
| 7 | Cash incentive for shifting | 1,000 | Displaced family |
| 8. | Miscellaneous expenses | 1,000 | Forest department |
| TOTAL | | Rs. 100,000 | |

1) LAND (QUANTITY AND QUALITY)

While quality of land allotted to the displaced villages at the relocation site is not homogenous, by and large the displaced households have received land of poor quality. Although agricultural experts have certified most of this land as potentially cultivable, in general soil depth and soil moisture is lower than what was available inside the sanctuary. While there are many instances of allotment by the forest department of alternative land in lieu of poor agricultural plots, this has been a slow process, given the large number of such cases and low availability of surplus land. The importance of soil and water conservation and watershed development interventions cannot be overemphasized in the context of a dry and arid area like Kuno. A clear distinction needs to be made between a relative assessment of the package and its delivery, and a judgment in absolute terms of whether the relocated people have been compensated fully for the losses suffered due to displacement. While implementing / assessing the rehabilitation programme, it is also common to make the critical analytical error of comparing the actual poverty situation of the villages before relocation with the 10 potential been stressed by recent studies (Shah and Vijayshankar 2002) for the central Indian drylands, reform in land holding is not a sufficient condition for ensuring agriculture based livelihood security, unless accompanied by land use reform. Though the forest department has undertaken some watershed development activities, the lack of adequate planning and expertise has meant that the net impact of such activities has been negligible. The reality of Kuno, however, is that the funds meant for land development have been used largely for payment to external agencies for bulldozing and clearing of land, and till the end of 2004, not a single functional fuel and fodder plantation had been created in any displaced village.

2) AGRICULTURE

After relocation, the crop-mix has not changed much in the displaced villages, but our studies indicate that the yield of most crops has gone down significantly. For instance, a survey of 14 displaced villages in November-December 2002 found that only 19 out of 715 families (or 2.6 per cent of households surveyed) were able to produce 40 kg or more of crop output on their farm plot of 2 hectares. In addition to three consecutive rain failures between 2001-04, other factors responsible for this include low soil moisture, lack of access to farmyard manure (because of fodder shortage, which limits livestock holdings), absence of protective irrigation facilities, and poor quality of land. An important reason for reduced output is that the displaced families have no facilities for protecting their crops against depredation by free-grazing cattle belonging to host villages in the relocation area, which were traditionally left to graze in the land that has now been given to the displaced villages for agriculture. The rehabilitation package did not foresee this problem, and did not make provisions for crop protection measures. Therefore, few farmers possess draught animals for ploughing their fields, and the dependence of the displaced households on hired tractors has gone up heavily. In the absence of ready cash for payment to tractor owners, a high proportion of tribal farmers enter into sharecropping arrangements with tractor owners and end up losing more than half their farm produce to the latter. This illustrates clearly the point made earlier about breakdown of traditional linkages between farm activities and livestock rearing, which is symptomatic of disrupted complementarities between common and private property resources.

3) NTFP AND FUEL WOOD

After relocation of villages, access to forests has been reduced, and consequently, many traditional NTFP collection activities have now disappeared almost entirely from the activity chart of the community. The diversity and quantity of forest products collected by each family has dwindled. The adverse impact of this has been especially high during drought years, since such communities typically resort to forest produce collection as an important coping strategy during lean agricultural periods and drought (Jodha 1986). 9 Loss of NTFP has also reduced availability of medicinal herbs for indigenous medicine or home remedies. Increased dependence of the community on allopathic medicines, coupled with short supply and prohibitively high cost of qualified medical professionals and quality medicines, has led the displaced people to depend on untrained but expensive medical practitioners with dubious qualifications.

4) LIVESTOCK

Post relocation, nearly two-thirds of the displaced families have had to leave most of their livestock inside the sanctuary because of low availability of fodder at the relocation site. At best, some families have been able to get a few cows, or a pair of bullocks with them to the new settlements. Compared to their earlier practice of free-grazing cattle in the forest, fodder at the relocation site is collected from common land or purchased from the market for stall feeding the livestock. With reduced access to common land, over 80 per cent of the displaced households have experienced heavy reduction in fodder availability and consequent decline in livestock holdings. This is one of the important limitations of displacement as a conservation tool, since it simply transfers pressures from protected areas to other forested regions located outside the PA network. This is obviously a short-term response, which does nothing to address the fundamental problem of unsustainable resource use practices.

5) WAGE LABOR

In the initial stages of relocation, the many households obtained wage employment on their own land through activities like digging wells, clearing land and constructing houses, for which funds from the rehabilitation package were allocated to them. This initially checked seasonal and distress migration, but was only a short term phenomenon that lasted only till funds were available for rehabilitation. Employment opportunities for the displaced households inside the sanctuary on works carried out by the forest department have also declined after relocation, because of the much greater physical distance between these villages and Kuno sanctuary. However, the loss of livelihood from forest department wage works needs to be offset against the greater wage earning opportunities made available by the process of relocation itself, under which various construction activities were commissioned at the resettlement site. Access to wage labor on government sponsored drought relief works also been an important source of wage income after relocation.

CONCLUSIONS

A cursory glance at the available evidence conveys that displacement from Wildlife protected areas in India has created no adverse implications for wildlife conservation, and may in fact have strengthened the potential of these PAs to protect biodiversity. But a closer look will reveal that most of the so-called successes stories stand on an edifice of increased destitution and vulnerability of what, even to begin with, were among the poorest and most marginalized communities in the country.

If the objectives of conservation and livelihood security of local residents of protected areas are placed on an equal footing, displacement from PAs does not emerge as a viable option, particularly on a large scale. The financial, physical and human resource requirements for designing and implementing a successful and voluntary rehabilitation are prohibitively high, especially given the existing mindset and expertise available with the official conservation machinery in a country like India. On the other hand, the economic and social costs of failure to rehabilitate are so severe for the affected community that it is ethically unacceptable to use displacement, in its present form and content, as a conservation tool in other protected areas. Therefore, even though conservation practice (as different from conservation theory) still perceives displacement as the most important weapon in its armoury to deal with resident communities in protected areas, mainstream conservation thinking has in recent years begun to question its validity. With the strengthening of democracy and increased penetration of remote and wild areas due to communication technology, it is likely that people living inside protected areas will increasingly resist involuntary displacement and reject poorly designed and ill-implemented rehabilitation packages. Therefore, it is imperative that alternative methods be found of reconciling conservation and local livelihood needs, and the most important emerging challenge for protected area managers in poor countries will be to balance local livelihood needs with conservation objectives.

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