Socio - Economic Rehabilitation post Relocation from Critical Tiger Habitats

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Dhruvi Shah is Programme Director, RBS Foundation India and N Sunil Kumar is Director, RBS Foundation India.

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Email: info@fledge.in; URL: www.fledge.in
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Introduction
Rehabilitation and relocation of people from critical habitats of species has long received much attention not only from conservation specialists but also sociologists and economists owing to the challenges in making the process predictable, responsive and transparent with the full and informed participation of members of the communities involved.

Governments across the world received criticism from a range of stakeholders for not being sensitive to the social, cultural and economic needs of people to be re-located and take cognitive action to communicate appropriately the need for actions and ensuing options and opportunities.

Protection and rehabilitation of tiger habitats in India has continuously received significant attention of policy makers, conservationists and planners whose primary attention is seen as protecting the big cat. In India, the empirical scientific data and simulation analysis establishes that a minimum inviolate area of 800-1200sq.km is required for a viable population of tiger (20 breeding tigresses). Further, an ecologically sensitive zone (buffer / coexistence area / multiple use area) of 1000-3000 sq.km is required around this inviolate space for supporting dispersal age tigers, surplus breeding age tigers and old displaced tigers. Together
with the core area, this would maintain source-sink dynamics while sustaining a population of 75-100 tigers. To create such inviolate spaces, the conservation strategy in India supports a voluntary relocation and resettlement of villages located in these designated areas.

This paper examines the process and relevance of a structured intervention for the voluntary relocation and resettlement (R&R) of villages from the Critical Tiger Habitats (CTH) of Tiger Reserves in India. The rehabilitation and resettlement is a structured process that is based on the guidelines issued by the centrally sponsored scheme of Project Tiger and implemented by the relevant Forest department of the state.
The Scenario
Conservation strategy in India has evolved over the decades to recognize the interdependence of ecosystems and communities and to integrate this dynamic into conservation policy. India being a fast growing economy, since independence, has placed a great demand on land for development of infrastructure and for agriculture and manufacturing. Forest land has come under pressure for diversion of land from forest to non-forest purposes and the livelihoods of communities occupying prime ecosystems progressed from mere harvest to extraction for value addition to cater to a growing demand for forest based products. In response to this, the habitats of large mammals experienced significant pressures with habitat loss on one side and increasing intrusion from people in the remaining habitats.

Against this background, the species retrieval programmes, more importantly the Project Tiger, started looking at remaining undisturbed habitats as inviolate spaces for source populations. As part of this approach voluntary relocation of communities occupying prime habitats viz. ‘Critical Tiger habitat’ (Sec 38, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972) was introduced with a compensation package for resettlement.

National Tiger Conservation Authority estimates indicate that there are 700 no of villages with a population of 45000 households
residing in what is termed as the inviolate or the core areas of a 48 Tiger reserves in the country. With enormous challenges to living in forest areas ranging from inaccessible roads to increasing man Animal conflict and livestock depredation from wild carnivores, forest dwelling communities are forced to look at alternate options for secured lives for themselves and the livestock they maintain.

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Chapter IV of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (Section 24) provides for acquisition of rights in or over the land declared by the State Government under Section 18 (for constituting a Sanctuary) or Section 35 (for constituting a National Park). Sub-section 2 of Section 24 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, authorizes the Collector to acquire such land or rights. Therefore, payment of compensation
for the immovable property of people forms part of modifying / settling their rights which is a statutory requirement.
Compensating Relocation
The process begins with the consensus of the villages to relocate and agreement on the package. Currently, the proposed package has two options:

Option I — Payment of the entire package amount (Rs. 10 lakhs per family, equivalent to USD 15,000) to the family. This option is without any rehabilitation / relocation process facilitated by the Forest Department. In order to ensure that there is a fool-proof process, a monitoring mechanism involving the District Magistrate of concerned District(s) is ensured so that the villagers rehabilitate themselves with the package money provided to them. In this regard, a mechanism involving handholding, preferably by external agencies including the civil society organizations and NGOs is also ensured. A considerable portion of the amount is kept as a fixed deposit in the name of the beneficiary with a nationalized bank. The interest is generated on a monthly basis, provides a monthly income for the family.

Option II — Carrying out relocation / rehabilitation of village from protected area / tiger reserve by the Forest Department. The package is similar to option 1 ie Rs 10 lakh per family but the compensation is tied to the following – Agriculture land purchase and development – 35%, Settlement of Rights – 30%, Homestead
and house construction - 20%, incentive 5% and Community facility – 10%

Basis the package chosen, the resettlement process begins. For families who have opted for the cash option relocates to a place of their choice. In order to ensure that they settle and acquire income generating assets, monitoring continues through the district and state level committees. For families who have chosen the option – 2, relocation and resettlement is a longer process that begins with identification of suitable agricultures land and making it cultivable; transfer rights, construction of homes and homestead and recreating of livelihoods. Further to the involvement of the Forest Department 2 committees are constituted to ensure an integrated approach towards resettlement. A state level committee comprising the chief secretary of the state and secretaries of related department, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and the Chief Wildlife Warden (CWW) is formed and a district level committee comprising the District Collector (DC), the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) and representative officials form various departments.
Challenges in the Process of Relocation
The process for relocation and resettlement is well defined with clear roles and responsibility, multi-tier monitoring committee; however the actualisation of benefits remains a long process with several challenges along the way.

Some of the key challenges that is faced by all the stakeholders is that of coordinating with the several line departments, committees, integrating the communities socio – cultural characteristics with that of the new settled area, building capacities to adopt newer forms of livelihood that include enhanced exposure to market forces, at times different ways of financial management, ensure that the communities don’t overspend on non productive assets etc.

The most difficult challenge that is faced by the community is that of its own ability to manage risk. Having learnt a way of life in the forest, an inherent skill is developed and passed on from generation to generation to identify and mitigate the risks of living in the forest. Post relocation this knowledge becomes redundant making the community vulnerable to risks that are new to them, resulting into reduced confidence levels. Therefore it is not uncommon to find communities that continue to maintain houses in both the locations and to leave behind cattle in the forest- a practice that appears to subvert the relocation and resettlement objective. While these
challenges exist, an efficient and effective relocation process can be a win-win that while it creates inviolate spaces for critical species (and in a wider sense, for an ecosystem that provides global services), it provides a sustainable source of livelihoods and life quality to excluded and marginalized communities.

Prima facie, these communities appear to hold robust net-worth post the settlement of rights and packages and that perhaps is a reason that these communities fail to attract private/bi-lateral/multilateral funding for livelihoods, health, education or such other services.

One of our initial exposures to a relocation and resettlement community at Melghat Tiger Reserve revealed that while the government and the state Forest Department have done a commendable job in the execution, the community was vulnerable to the risks that come with rural/semi-urban life. While their net-worth looked good, they had no access to basic means of production and exchange as well as become ineligible for other forms of State support and relief packages. It was perceived that a little handholding could go a long way in hastening the processes of integrating these communities into the wider rural/semi-urban societies and value chains.
The Intervention from RBS
The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) Foundation India (RBS FI) is a company under section 8 of the Indian companies Act, 2013 promoted in 2007 by The Royal Bank of Scotland to undertake community development work in India. As a strategy that encompasses economic empowerment and financial inclusion, RBS FI works with 91000 forest dependent households in 5 landscapes of the country. The strategy on forest dependent communities led it to turn their focus on communities resettled from CTH. Over the last 8 years, RBS Foundation India has extended support to the resettlement process of the communities from Ranthambore Tiger Reserve, Simlipal Biosphere, Nagarhole Tiger Reserve, Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Anshi Dandeli Tiger Reserve, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, Madumalai Tiger Reserve, Melghat Tiger Reserve and Satpuda Tiger Reserve. The premise of action by RBS FI is based on the assumption that development process have to address not just economic development, but social equality and acceptance and ecological resilience.

At the invitation of the Forest Department, District Collector or the community to support at a specified relocation zone, RBS FI usually begins with an assessment of local needs, options and value chain followed by a baseline survey. Based on these assessments, RBS
FI partners with a local NGO to bring in the required expertise to prepare a livelihoods support plan. This project plan is developed in alignment with the relocation and rehabilitation plan that complements and builds upon the related activities. The actions are designed in a manner that project plays the role of an enabler on ground for enterprise, a collective voice of the community and a bridge to the wider society and mainstream economy.

The supportive project period is usually for 3-5 years with a specific exit plan. The measure of success for relocation and rehabilitation for various stakeholders remains different. For example, for the Forest department, the process is successful as soon as the community starts living in the new area and forest starts to regenerate in the vacated site, For the District Collector, it is a success when the roads are built, land ownerships has been assigned, access has been established for public utilities. For the Community the resettlement is successful when they have been able to achieve the aspiration that had motivated them to relocate. Such motivations largely involve having secure and sustainable source(s) of income, a cohesive community, and integration in to the new economy and build resilience to the new risks and challenges that they will face. .
Case Study
RBS FI is supporting rehabilitation and resettlement of 13 villages comprising 600 families relocated from the Critical Tiger Habitat’ of the Satpuda Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh since 2014. The intervention was initiated post the resettlement. It is worth noting that the relocated sites are 20-40 kilometres away from the vacated villages. The villages were relocated with much handholding from the Forest department and the district administration within the framework of the relocation compensation package. While most of the families opted for option II, the conditions that prevailed at each relocation site varied from village as did the social and anthropological dynamics of each village. The first step for the RBS FI intervention was to establish a connect with the community and to set out the expectations namely, the entitlements were secured and that the intervention aimed at assisting the community to take up enterprise for sustainable incomes and to take the role of citizens along with the accompanying rights and responsibilities. While the construction of physical infrastructure comprising housing and common facilities was underway, discussions on building and stabilising livelihoods were initiated.

Through tools household surveys and participatory rural appraisal, a road map is drawn for each village. The set of livelihood needs
that emerged were - support to agriculture, non farm livelihoods, and vocational trainings for the youth. Agriculture support included land levelling, provision of irrigation facility, seeds and cropping technology like the SRI have been introduced, and Non farm livelihoods like poultry, vegetable cultivation, and sericulture have been introduced to ensure cash income through sale in nearby markets. Vocational trainings like driving training, masonry, have been initiated, though on a small scale, ensures local employability. Efforts are also made to strengthen the community governance through formation of SHG and building capacity of the gram sabha.

A district level monitoring committee has been set up comprising representation from Forest Department, District administration, RBS FI and a local NGO to ensure that all applicable government schemes are channelled effectively for the benefit of the resettled community. This is also a platform to bring forth communities concerns and issues regarding the resettlement.

The project strives to create opportunities and hand hold the community to settle or mainstream. While there are several newer opportunities available to the community because of proximity to the market, its takes 4-6 years for the community to fully integrate with the new form of economy.
Lessons Learnt
The project intervention is broadly based on the framework that enables the following outcomes a) creating a community governance mechanism b) providing a livelihood portfolio with capacity building and linkages c) enhancing financial literacy and d) provision of access to government programs and public utilities.

Since each of the project starts at a different entry point in the life cycle of relocation and rehabilitation based on the ecosystem and community, the implementing strategy is based on detailed assessment and community expectation mapping to achieve the intended outcomes. Some of the generic outcomes are elaborated as under

a) **Community Governance** - Community governance is an important element of the resettlement process. Robust community governance forms the base for implementing other initiatives and enables implementing the exit strategy. It also plays important role in reviving or rebuilding the socio-cultural elements or way of life for the community. This becomes even more critical if two forest villages are resettled into one area or vice versa. The community governance includes creating Self Help Groups (SHGs), farmer (Kisan) clubs, producer collectives, village development committee and the Gram Sabha (local self-governance mechanism established
by the Government). These plays an important role in the community taking ownership of action for the self and community developments.

b) Livelihoods – A livelihood strategy for the entire village is planned basis the land availability, cultivability of the land, availability of water, available skills, productive and funding options. Through a series of consultative and capacity building of the community, village level planning is carried out. Food security is first ensured through a combination of right cropping practices including creation of a kitchen garden. A basket of options for seeking livelihoods is created to ensure regular cash incomes and risk mitigation. Several small micro enterprise development models and options are also provided. such as maintaining poultry, duckery, apiculture, dairy farm etc. Market linkages are facilitated through producer collective to nearby towns.

c) Financial literacy - The relocation and rehabilitation package results in communities having access to large sums of money. With limited experience of financial management in the scale available, could lead to the risk of inappropriate utilization of the funds. As a proactive measure to ensure that the community is equipped with
capacities to make informed choices, financial literacy training is imparted to the community through several capacity building programmes, including access to banking and financing institutions.

Access to government programs – As a revenue village, the community is eligible for several of the ongoing government programs that includes, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and others that include support to rural agriculture and allied programmes, and non-agricultural programmes as well. Support is provided to ensure that the related communities continue to receive support through these programmes as needed and as eligible.
Conclusions
As we gain in experience of relocation and resettlement, there is an evolution and improvisation of the way in which engagement with the community and other stakeholders are possible in order to achieve better results. Each of the stakeholders faces several challenges and constraints during the different stages of the relocation and rehabilitation process.

While the government faces challenges like time lags in funding, seeking community agreements, finding the right place for resettlement and others, the community faces distress on account of settling in a new and inexperienced area, reviving the livelihoods, vulnerability due to change in risk management skills and the related. The District administration is constrained by its multiple line departments and conflicting priorities to deliver results and provide support to the communities.

The RBS FI program enables a common platform for dialogue with stakeholders that facilitate the strengthening of each role in the relocation and resettlement value chain with predictability and involvement. It is envisaged that all of the stakeholders will continue to go through steep learning processes as the relocation and resettlement process goes on, not only in Tiger habitats but also
through land acquisition processes to enable development priorities. Changing socio-economic needs and cultural adjustments need to be carefully considered to ensure the lessons learned are useful and responsive.
About FLEDGE

FLEDGE (Forum for Law, Environment, Development and Governance) is a non-profit trust established in November 2014 to work on a array of issues pertaining to law, environment, development and governance. The core focus of FLEDGE would be fostering sustainable environment and development laws and policies within a larger framework of good governance.

In particular, FLEDGE focuses on human resource development, capacity building and awareness raising using research and analysis as the basic tools combined with field analyses, as needed.

It will also work towards creating networks and communities of practice to tap uncommon opportunities and to train the next generation of environment and development practitioners, using knowledge platforms.