

farmland just outside it after a successful land claim. In spite of being the richest landowners in the area, they were soon divided into 'traditionals' (who wanted to revert to a forager lifestyle) and 'moderns' (who wanted to engage with the tourist industry and other enterprises). Thus while government officials, lawyers, donors, and non-governmental organisations had helped facilitate a successful land claim so as to restore lost land and dignity, they did not foresee the splintering of the group, and the rancour and great loss of money that ensued. This case may well provide caution for social scientists and planners to contextualise each land eviction carefully, taking both history and community into account.

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## Aversion to Relocation: A Myth?

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Population displacement from protected areas is a contentious issue. To date, social science literature has largely been against displacement, given the social injustices and deprivations that have, in the past, resulted from it. Based upon over a decade of research on the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), Maharashtra, India, by SHODH: The Institute for Research and Development, we would like to raise a few supplementary points.

When SHODH began its baseline socio-economic study of the six villages located within the TATR, we held the common opinion that displacement has a detrimental effect on oustees and should thus take place only as a final resort, if at all. However, our subsequent research has revealed that the TATR villagers are largely not averse to the idea of relocating, and in fact many actively want to relocate.

It is the harsh reality of residing within a protected area that has made displacement a preferred option for most. At present, exclusionary regulations are largely enforced in the TATR, despite village presence within the Reserve's boundaries. Consequently, village occupants are viewed as 'encroachers' on their own land, and collecting minor forest products, cultivating crops, and grazing livestock is restricted. For the same reason, and also due to their remote locations, the TATR villages also do not receive sufficient external development assistance. They therefore lack access to all-weather roads and thus to markets, they lack schools beyond fourth grade, and there is only one hospital. They are also isolated from the wider economy and the livelihood options that it offers, and thus have little option but to engage in forest-dependent occupations that are neither profitable, nor a preferred choice for most.



Photo: Kim Beazley

A former building in old Botezari



Photo: Kim Beazley

Botezari villagers at the relocation site



Photo: Kim Beazley

A view of the relocated village Bhagwanpur

A member of Botezari village likened living in Tadoba to residing at the bottom of a well, unable to escape and take advantage of the outside world, while a former *sarpanch* (head) of Jamni village was resolute that having seen her children grow up isolated from educational opportunities and thus illiterate, she would not see her grandchildren grow up the same way.

The legal obligation to move the TATR villages has been discussed for almost two decades. To date, two of the villages (Botezari and Kolsa) are in the process of moving out of the Reserve to a site that they themselves have selected. Two other villages (Navegaon and Jamni) have also expressed their desire to shift, particularly due to increased instances of crop depredation by wild animals, and loss of human life and livestock to tigers. However, for reasons known only to the authorities, these villagers' willingness to relocate has so far been ignored. The remaining two villages (Rantalodhi and Palasgaon), though not so enthused by the idea of displacement, have come up with various conditional charters of demands.

While these demands are very high, this in part reflects the vil-

lagers' political awareness. Indeed, there are certain indications that their demands are negotiable and thus that these villages too have some interest in relocation.

It is also important to note that just because negative assessments of past displacements dominate the literature, it need not be impossible to engineer a relocation that raises local living standards, and reduces, rather than re-establishes, previous poverty levels. Indeed, the current relocation of Botezari and Kolsa, despite taking a long time to come to fruition, looks set to have many positive consequences for the villagers in question.

While there have been numerous complications along the way, and the villagers that have already shifted are currently facing a range of problems as they settle in, the relocation site holds a level of amenities considerably greater than that in the original villages, and also greater than that in nearby villages outside the Reserve. Moreover, the relocation site is close to urban centres and all-weather roads, which should enable villagers to reduce their unwanted dependence upon forest-related occupations that are also low paying. Therefore, in our view, to assert that displacement is

inadvisable and socially unacceptable in all situations is just as problematic as it is to advocate involuntary displacement.

These points do not seek in any way to undermine the pressing need to explore the more theoretical, academic issue of the social (and for that matter biological) efficacy of the 'fortress' approach to conservation. Yet in the meantime, it is important not to fall into the trap of arguing against relocation as 'a matter of social principle'. As long as it is conducted in a sensitive and participatory manner, relocation has great potential to facilitate socioeconomic development rather than inhibit it.

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