

# EVICTED FOR DEVELOPMENT: HOW DO EVICTEES UNDERSTAND EVICTION

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## **Introduction**

Development forced displacement (DFD) can cause loss of rights, entitlements, livelihoods, and lead to the impoverishment of affected populations (Colson 2003; Crisp 1999; Harrell-Bond 1986; Oliver-Smith 1991). However, construction of large dams, reservoirs, airports, harbours, public buildings, hotels, roads, continue to occupy the central focus in development practice. Conventional wisdom suggests that development fosters greater benefit for society although a minority of displaced people would have to make some sacrifices. Often, policy makers, development practitioners, and corporate businesses think that development forced displacement is unavoidable and hence work only to minimize its adverse consequences. However, empirical evidence challenges this conventional wisdom. While the need for large scale development cannot be ruled out, there should be greater awareness of the extremely negative consequences on populations that are directly or indirectly displaced through development projects (Cernia 1997; Cernia 2000; Dwivedi, 1999; Mugaah 2008; Mehta 2008; Scudder 2005).

Scudder (2009) shows that negative effects of DFD can be felt over an extended period of time, at times, much after development planners have determined that everything has been ‘successfully’ completed. Displacement in rural areas sometimes pushes the affected populations to migrate to cities and settle in places lacking facilities and means to support large numbers of migrants. Often this leads to the expansion or creation of new slums with inadequate basic amenities such as water, sanitation, health services, access to education etc. (Pavanello, Elhawary and Pantuliano, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> The three-year research project that supports this paper was carried out by a group of researchers including the author of this paper.

Development planners often prioritise large-scale development over small scale more sustainable projects, although the latter has the potential to generate as much gains as the larger projects. But Ooi Lin (2008) aptly observes that large-scale constructions more than sustainable alternatives symbolize modernization and progress. It is in this context that scholars and development practitioners must pay attention to policies that can safeguard the interest of development displacees. As argued by Mugaah (2008) Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement Regime (DIDR) is important to manage displacement and resettlement avoiding its debilitating consequences. Here, regime means the policies, standards, procedures etc., which have been adopted by governments and IFOs. There are global treaties, conventions and agreements, which form the basis of the DIDR (Cohen, 2004; COHRE 2014; Morvaridi, 2008).

### **Methodology**

This paper draws on empirical data collected in Colombo from 2013-2016 in the following locations hosting multi-storeyed housing complexes; Sinhapura, Sahaspura, Wadulu Sewana, Lunawa, Sirisarauyana and Mihidusenpura. Two slum communities, 17<sup>th</sup> lane and Halgahakumbura, were selected as control groups (non-DFDs). The research study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analytical tools. The researchers conducted about 50 in-depth interviews of key informants, group meetings, observations and a survey of 900 respondents. A grounded theory approach guides the analysis of qualitative data while statistical tests are used to analyse the survey data.

### **Results and Discussion**

Slum communities, although occupying potentially prime lands, are physically and socially marginalized and suffer from a range of issues such as substandard infrastructure, low quality housing, rain water flooding, social stigma, relative absence of privacy, drug abuse, alcoholism, frequent verbal altercations, petty theft, trespassing etc. Parents are concerned about the suitability of the environment for children. Many are uncertain about their future, as evictions are a constant threat. The paper focuses on how these communities experience and reflect upon the displacement and resettlement process.

### ***Consultation***

The study finds serious problems in the process adopted by the government. In the six housing complexes that were studied, there was no evidence of a consultative process that provided information of the impending development projects; purpose of development, alternatives, time durations, benefits for people etc. The lack of consultation has resulted in design flaws, mismatches between life style and the housing design etc.

### ***Fairplay and Respect***

A lack of fairness in the approach of the government officials handling displacement and resettlement was also detected. Officials often gave people the impression that replacement housing was charitable work on the part of the government. The displaced demanded that they be treated decently, and wanted to be significant and equal players rather than destitutes of a development project.

### ***Understanding Heterogeneity***

The planners conceptualize slum dwellers as the poor who are squatters on government lands. This is however, incorrect as residents often have decent incomes, stable houses and other assets such as vehicles. Respondents emphasized that they have proper ownership of the properties.

### ***Compensation***

DFDR requires that evictees be compensated with replacement value not only for the land they part with but also for the structures and even vegetation in acquired land, even if there is no title for such lands. None of the projects studied in Colombo has fulfilled these best practices. Although people have been given new housing units, none of the relocated people have received deeds to their new property. For example, those in Sahaspura have waited 12 years to receive a deed and hence have absolutely no proof that they own the houses they live in. In the newer housing schemes, constructed within the last several years, the government has demanded that recipients pay for the new houses in multi-storeyed buildings. Officials believe that the 'squatters' should not be given 'free' houses.

### ***Use of Coercion***

Respondents accused the government of using indirect and direct force for eviction. Arbitrary decision making, at times, involving military officials and the use of force in evictions was observed. There was also evidence of indirect coercion; for example, people displaced from the Torrington area were given money for renting a house until construction of new houses was completed. Two years later rent money has been discontinued and the community was forced to accept new houses in Wanathamulla. Demolitions were carried out with the participation of security personnel.

### ***Loss of Assets and Services***

Resettled communities have lost certain assets, benefits and services they had enjoyed including access to prestigious schools in Colombo, easy access to transport, and proximity to employment etc. Further, services in the post-settlement phase have been poor. Collection of garbage has been a significant problem as is the dilapidated conditions of the drainage system.

### ***Grievance Redress***

The grievance redress mechanisms remain weak and many problems remain unaddressed for a long periods of time. Some people had resorted to legal actions but they feel that the judicial process under the previous regime was not a viable option due to the partiality of the courts.

### **References**

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