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Review Paper

Socioeconomic Rehabilitation for Forest Dwellers and the Sustainable Livelihood Approach: A Review

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ABSTRACT

The creation of protected areas can restrict access to resources crucial for forest dwellers' livelihoods. Socioeconomic rehabilitation programs aim to address this issue by providing alternative income sources and improving living standards. A sustainable livelihood approach emphasizes empowering communities to develop livelihoods that coexist with forest conservation. This paper explores the sustainable livelihood model of the Bhadra Tiger Reserve, where relocations have been attempted with mixed success. This highlights the importance of comprehensive support beyond relocation, including income generation and access to basic amenities.

1. Introduction

The Bhadra Tiger Reserve, a critical conservation area in Karnataka, India, is a cornerstone of biodiversity preservation, yet it is home to significant socio-cultural challenges. For decades, the forest-dependent communities residing in the area have faced numerous hardships in accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, police, and other urban facilities due to the remote nature of their settlements. These residents, while integral to the region's history and ecosystem, have been subject to relocation efforts aimed at mitigating human-wildlife conflicts and supporting wildlife conservation initiatives, especially tiger protection. This article delves into the pre-relocation challenges encountered by the Bhadra community. With vast distances to crucial services, daily life posed a daunting struggle for the residents. Children had limited access to education, healthcare was a far cry from reality, and essential administrative services like police stations and post offices were virtually inaccessible. These conditions compounded the already fragile relationship between human settlements and the protected wildlife, eventually contributing to the decision to relocate.

By exploring these pre-relocation dynamics, this article sheds light on the socio-economic fabric of the Bhadra community and the complexities of balancing conservation needs with the well-being of indigenous populations. Understanding these challenges is crucial for shaping more effective relocation and rehabilitation strategies, ensuring that future conservation efforts are not only ecologically sustainable but also socially just.

The existence and nurturing of forest resources are necessary for maintaining this hormonal relationship. The conservation of biodiversity is a global priority, often achieved through the establishment of protected areas such as tiger reserves. However, these PAs can create conflicts when they overlap with traditional territories and when forest-dwelling communities are

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resource dependent. This intricate relationship between conservation and the well-being of forest dwellers necessitates strategies that balance both objectives. The Bhadra Tiger Reserve in India serves as a compelling case study for exploring this complex dynamic. Forest dwellers within the reserve rely on its resources for subsistence, and restrictions imposed for tiger conservation can significantly impact their livelihoods. This paper investigates how socioeconomic rehabilitation programs and a sustainable livelihood approach can address this challenge. Socioeconomic rehabilitation programs aim to mitigate the negative impacts of conservation on forest communities by providing alternative income sources and improving living standards. This research delves into the effectiveness of such programs in the Bhadra Tiger Reserve, particularly focusing on resettlement initiatives. Furthermore, this paper explores the concept of a sustainable livelihood approach. This approach empowers forest dwellers to develop income generation activities that are compatible with forest conservation. Examples include nontimber forest product cultivation and marketing and ecotourism initiatives. By analyzing the Bhadra Tiger Reserve case study, this research aims to offer valuable insights for policymakers and conservation practitioners. We examine the limitations of resettlement-centric approaches and emphasize the importance of comprehensive support for relocated communities. This study highlights the potential of sustainable livelihood options for fostering a harmonious relationship between conservation efforts and the well-being of forest dwellers in protected areas.

1.1. Forest Dweller Relocation and Rehabilitation:

Das and Behera (2018) noted that many PAs in Asia, particularly in India, house a large number of people (Dash & Behera, 2018). These residents rely heavily on PA forests for their daily livelihoods (Dash & Behera, 2018; Jain & Sajjad, 2015a, 2015b; Misbahuzzaman & Smith-Hall, 2015; Rayamajhi et al., 2012). This can lead to forest degradation, harming both plants and animals. Additionally, conflicts frequently arise between these residents and wildlife, resulting in crop and livestock damage, injuries, and deaths on both sides (Karanth et al., 2013, 2018; Lasgorceix & Kothari, 2009). Tensions are further heightened by disagreements over forest use rules, ownership rights, and mistrust between PA managers and local communities (Behera & Engel, 2005; Kumar & Kant, 2005; Lasgorceix & Kothari, 2009).

These threats to conservation posed by human activity have led to the idea of creating "inviolable" or "people-free" zones within PAs to achieve better biodiversity conservation outcomes (Kabra, 2009). To implement this concept, policymakers across Asia have increasingly turned to displacing local communities from biodiversity-rich areas as a strategy to reduce human pressure (Dash & Behera, 2018; Jain & Sajjad, 2015b; Kabra, 2009; Karanth, 2007; Li et al., 2014; Peng et al., 2020). This represents the extreme version of the prevalent "fortress" or "exclusionary" conservation paradigm (Kabra, 2009). The displacement of native populations for environmental conservation is sometimes referred to as "ecological migration or relocation" (Li et al., 2014; Peng et al., 2020). This displacement can be voluntary, forced, or induced (Lasgorceix & Kothari, 2009).

While policymakers view relocation as a necessary and effective tool for ecological restoration and preservation, some scholars argue that it should only be used in specific contexts (Karanth, 2007). Numerous studies have highlighted the negative impacts of relocation on livelihoods (Dash & Behera, 2018; Lasgorceix & Kothari, 2009; Platt et al., 2016; Sharma, 2003) particularly for poor people (Kabra, 2009). Relocation also disrupts social and cultural aspects such as traditional rights, social justice, culture, history, and identity (Dash and Behera 2018). In contrast, there is little research on the impact of resettlement on improving biodiversity conservation through better PA management (Shahabuddin & Shah, 2003). Furthermore, displacing forest communities does not always guarantee better conservation outcomes; it may even create new challenges (Singh et al., 2022). Therefore, the decision to relocate people is often based more on speculation than on evidence (Kabra, 2009).

In India, the relocation of forest dwellers from PAs has recently become a central issue in debates among academics and policymakers concerning biodiversity conservation (Kabra, 2009; Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006). The number of national parks and sanctuaries in India has grown dramatically over the years. In 1970, there were only six national parks and 59 wildlife sanctuaries. As of December 2021, 5.26% of India's total landscape was protected through 106 national parks (1.35%), 564 wildlife sanctuaries (3.73%), 99 conservation reserves (0.14%), and 218 community reserves (0.04%) (ECoWPA 2022). The National Tiger Conservation Authority reported that there were 53 tiger reserves encompassing 75,796.83 square kilometers established by 2022 (NTCA 2023). The Tiger Task Force (2005) estimated that the core and buffer zones of the Tiger Reserves alone contained nearly 1500 villages with approximately 65,000 families (Tiger Task Force 2005). Forest managers have traditionally viewed local biomass extraction by forest dwellers as the most severe threat to biodiversity conservation. To address this perceived threat, village relocation has become a top priority in Indian PA management, often without adequate field-based research (Shahabuddin et al., 2005).

Researchers have identified several knowledge gaps regarding the displacement of forest dwellers in India (Kabra, 2009; Shahabuddin et al., 2005). Few studies have examined the specific processes of relocation efforts (Dash & Behera, 2018;

Sarma & Barpujari, 2023; Shahabuddin et al., 2005), the impacts on livelihoods (Kabra, 2009; Karanth, 2007; Sharma, 2003), the effectiveness of conservation (Platt et al., 2016), or communities' attitudes and motivations toward relocation (Dash & Behera, 2018; Jain & Sajjad, 2015a).

Furthermore, existing research is limited to a small number of sites, including the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, Sariska Tiger Reserve, Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary, Kanha National Park, Simlipal Tiger Reserve, and Satpura Tiger Reserve. While some studies have reported positive outcomes from relocation, such as improved access to basic services and increased income (Dash & Behera, 2018; Kabra, 2009; Karanth, 2007), others have highlighted negative consequences, including food insecurity, impoverishment, and even worsened conservation outcomes (Dash & Behera, 2018; Kabra, 2009; Karanth, 2007; Platt et al., 2016; Shahabuddin & Shah, 2003; Sharma, 2003). Singh et al. (2022) documented the long-term impoverishment of pastoral communities displaced from Khangchendzonga National Park (Singh et al., 2022).

Despite the mixed success of relocation projects (Jain & Sajjad, 2015a, 2015b), many poor communities face the threat of displacement in the name of conservation (Kabra, 2009, 2013). To address this critical issue, researchers need to better understand the livelihoods, challenges, and perspectives of forest dwellers before relocation. Additionally, more research is required on the factors influencing their willingness to relocate.

This study aims to contribute to this knowledge gap by focusing on the Bhadra Tiger Reserve (BTR), where relocation is one of the most successful projects in the name of Project Tiger. Despite long-standing efforts to relocate villages to create safer habitats for tigers, only one village has been completely displaced from the BTR. The recent sighting of a Royal Bengal Tiger in 2022 has intensified relocation efforts (The Third Pole 2022). In this context, understanding the livelihood patterns, motivations, and factors influencing the willingness of BTR communities to participate in relocation is crucial for developing effective resettlement policies.

1.2. Factors influencing the willingness to relocate forest dwellers

Several studies have explored the factors influencing households' decisions to relocate from protected areas (PAs) (Dash & Behera, 2018; Jain & Sajjad, 2015b, 2015a; Li et al., 2014). Here, we examine several key considerations.

Age: Age plays a significant role in relocation willingness (Dash & Behera, 2018; Jain & Sajjad, 2015a, 2015b; Li et al., 2014). While Dash and Behera (2018) and Li et al. (2014) found a negative association between age and willingness to relocate. They also observed a positive but no significant relationship. Younger people, drawn to modern lifestyles, may prefer to leave isolated areas and connect with broader society. Conversely, older residents may be more emotionally attached to their homes due to years spent there, making them less willing to move.

Education Level: Education level significantly impacts residents' attitudes toward relocation programs. A higher education level of the household head is positively correlated with relocation willingness. This can be attributed to the limited opportunities in remote locations. Relocation can potentially offer access to better employment opportunities, whereas those with less education may rely more on forest products and subsistence farming (Das & Chatterjee, 2017; U. Das & Behera, 2023; Dash & Behera, 2018; Jain & Sajjad, 2015b, 2015a).

Family Size: Family size is another factor that is positively associated with relocation willingness. Studies by many previously (Das & Chatterjee, 2017; U. Das & Behera, 2023; Dash & Behera, 2018; Jain & Sajjad, 2015b, 2015a) suggest that larger families are more likely to relocate than are smaller families. While Dash and Behera (2018) found family size to be a significant influence, other studies reported an insignificant effect (Dash & Behera, 2018).

Elderly Dependency Ratio: The number of elderly dependents in a household can affect relocation decisions. Li et al. (2014) suggested that uncertainty about post relocation livelihoods, particularly for households with high dependency ratios and limited labor availability discourages relocation. A higher elderly dependency ratio can make households more vulnerable to negative environmental conditions due to a lack of labor. Consequently, households with a higher elderly dependency ratio may be less willing to relocate (Li et al., 2014). *Forest Dependency:* Jain and Sajjad (2015) and Dash and Behera (2018) indicate that people who rely heavily on forest products are less likely to relocate. Their livelihoods and daily needs are tied to nearby forests, making them hesitant to move (Dash & Behera, 2018; Jain & Sajjad, 2015a, 2015b). This study measured household dependency on forest resources for fuelwood collection and livestock grazing.

Ecotourism and Forest Department Work: Participation in ecotourism activities can influence relocation decisions. Ecotourism offers employment and livelihood benefits to local residents (M. Das & Chatterjee, 2020). Therefore, households involved in

ecotourism may be less likely to relocate from the PA. This study estimated household income from ecotourism and work with the Forest Department (FD).

Environmental Changes: Environmental degradation can significantly influence residents’ willingness to relocate. Li et al. (2014) reported that people who perceive worsening problems such as vegetation deterioration or land salinization are more likely to consider moving than people who do not(Li et al., 2014). Similarly, Harihar et al. (2014) identified declining forest productivity as a key factor driving the resettlement of Gujjar pastoralists in India. Residents may be less inclined to relocate if the forest conditions are good (Harihar et al., 2014).

Human–wildlife conflict: High levels of human–wildlife conflict can also motivate relocation decisions (Karanth et al., 2018). Households may choose to relocate to escape these conflicts.

1.3 Objectives of this paper:

This paper develops

a) conceptual model for sustainable livelihoods that includes factors influencing relocation,

b) socioeconomic factors and

c) the role of forest departments in relocation. We then discuss the theoretical underpinnings of socioeconomic rehabilitation programs and the sustainable livelihood approach.

Next, we delve into the specific case of the Bhadra Tiger Reserve, analyzing resettlement attempts and exploring the potential for sustainable livelihood initiatives. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing key takeaways and suggesting avenues for further research.

2. Research Model

The research model presented aims to enhance the socioeconomic rehabilitation of forest dwellers by addressing the factors influencing relocation and ensuring sustainable livelihoods. It integrates various socioeconomic and environmental factors to develop a comprehensive approach to support communities affected by relocation due to conservation efforts in the Bhadra Tiger Reserve. The Bhadra Model, as presented, focuses on the socioeconomic rehabilitation of forest dwellers in the Bhadra Tiger Reserve in Karnataka. The model highlights several key factors influencing relocation and the sustainable livelihood of these communities (Figure 1).

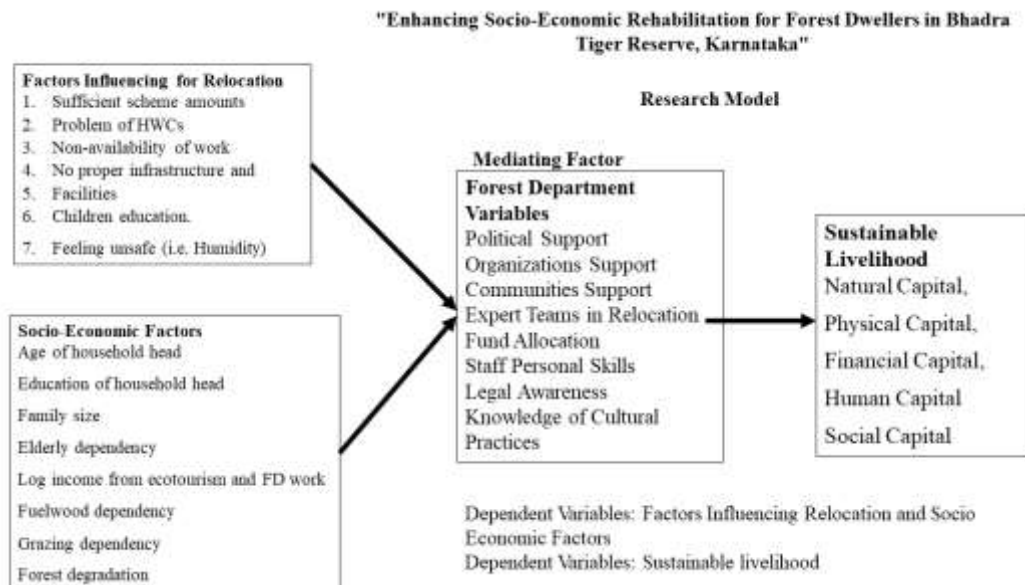


Fig 1: Factors based research model

2.1. Key components of the Bhadra model for sustainable livelihoods

2.1.1. Factors Influencing Relocation

1. Sufficient Scheme Amounts: Adequate financial support through various schemes.
2. Problem of Human–Wildlife Conflicts (HWCs): Issues arising from interactions between humans and wildlife.
3. Nonavailability of Work: Lack of employment opportunities.
4. Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities: Poor infrastructure and lack of basic facilities.

5. Children's Education: Concerns regarding the education of children.
6. Feeling unsafe (e.g., due to humidity): Safety concerns related to environmental conditions.
7. Socioeconomic Factors:
8. Age of Household Head: Impact of age on decision-making and adaptability.
9. Education of Household Head: Influence of education level on socioeconomic status.
10. Family Size: Size of the family and its economic implications.
11. Elderly Dependency: Dependence on elderly family members.
12. Income Sources: Income from Ecotourism and Forest Department Work.
13. Fuelwood Dependency: Reliance on forest resources for fuel
14. Grazing Dependency: Dependence on forestland for grazing livestock.
15. Forest Degradation: Impact of deforestation on livelihoods.
16. Forest Department Variables:
17. Political Support: Involvement and backing from political entities.
18. Organizations Support: Support from various organizations.
19. Community Support: Engagement and assistance from local communities.
20. Expert Teams in Relocation: Involvement of experts in the relocation process.
21. Fund Allocation: Distribution and management of funds.
22. Staff Personal Skills: Skills and competencies of the staff involved.
23. Legal Awareness: Awareness of legal rights and regulations.
24. Knowledge of Cultural Practices: Understanding and respecting cultural practices of the forest dwellers.
25. Sustainable livelihood capabilities:
26. Natural Capital: Access to natural resources.
27. Physical capital: Infrastructure and physical assets.
28. Financial Capital: Financial resources and economic stability.
29. Human capital: Education, skills, and health of community members.
30. Social Capital: Social networks and community support.

2.2. Relationships among Factors Related to Sustainable Livelihood

2.2.1. *Influencing Factors and Socioeconomic Factors*: Influencing factors such as nonavailability of work and inadequate infrastructure directly impact socioeconomic factors such as income levels and family size. Human-wildlife conflicts and feeling unsafe can affect the health and safety of households, which in turn influences their socioeconomic status.

2.2.2. *Socioeconomic Factors and Sustainable Livelihood Capitals*: The socioeconomic profile of a household, including education and income levels, determines its access to and ability to utilize various types of livelihood capital. Larger family sizes or high dependency ratios may strain financial and human capital.

2.2.3. *Sustainable Livelihood Capitals and Relocation Outcomes*: Adequate natural and financial capital can make relocation more feasible and sustainable. Strong social capital (community networks) can provide support during the relocation process, improving the resilience of households.

2.2.4. *Forest Department Variables and Sustainable Livelihood*: Effective fund allocation and political, organizational, and community support, along with knowledgeable staff, can enhance the relocation process and support sustainable livelihoods. Legal awareness and understanding of cultural practices ensure that relocation policies are respectful and inclusive, leading to better socioeconomic rehabilitation.

3. Conclusion

The Bhadra Model presented in this paper offers a framework for enhancing the socioeconomic rehabilitation of forest dwellers impacted by relocation due to conservation efforts in the Bhadra Tiger Reserve. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding the factors influencing relocation decisions and fostering sustainable livelihoods for these communities. The model identifies key factors influencing relocation. These factors, such as inadequate infrastructure and human-wildlife conflict, can act as deterrents to relocation. Addressing these concerns is crucial for successful resettlement. Socioeconomic Factors: Age, education, family size, and income sources all influence a community's willingness and ability to relocate and adapt to a new environment. Sustainable Livelihood Capitals: The model highlights the importance of building natural, physical, financial, human, and social capital to ensure a smooth transition and long-term sustainability. Forest Department Variables: Effective resource allocation, political and community support, and knowledgeable staff are essential for implementing relocation programs in a sensitive and inclusive manner.

By integrating these components, the Bhadra Model offers a more comprehensive approach to socioeconomic rehabilitation than relocation-centric policies. Future research can explore the effectiveness of the Bhadra Model through field studies and assess its applicability to other contexts. This research underscores the need for a nuanced approach to conservation that balances biodiversity protection with the well-being of forest dwellers. By prioritizing sustainable livelihoods and fostering collaboration between communities, conservation efforts, and the Forest Department, a win-win situation can be achieved for both people and nature.

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