

**The Double Bind:**  
**A Gender Analysis of Forced Displacement and Resettlement**

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## Abstract

This paper offers conceptual, practical and political perspectives on issues of gender, displacement and resettlement. It argues that displaced women are often caught in a double bind. On one hand, male biases in society help perpetuate gender inequality in terms of unequal resource allocation and distribution and also legitimise the silencing of women's interests in forced displacement processes. On the other hand, biases within state institutions, structures and policies dealing with R and R help perpetuate and exacerbate these inequalities, even though resettlement programmes have the potential to create institutional structures that at least at the *de jure* level could help remedy past inequalities.

The paper begins by examining how a gender analysis of current practice in resettlement calls for a re-examination of several key concepts around which displacement processes and resettlement programmes are premised. They include: the notion of the oustee which is often unproblematically assumed to be a male householder; the family which is assumed to be a unitary and homogenous entity; the nature of losses which are deemed to be calculable and notions of well-being which are often conceived of in material terms. However, women's rights, assets and spheres of control often centre around informal institutional arrangements which are rarely captured in and understood by policy makers and risk being undermined in the course of resettlement. The paper also examines the widely applied Risks and Reconstruction model of World Bank sociologist Micheal Cernea which has enhanced resettlement theory, research and practice by its focus on impoverishment. The paper argues that while this model acknowledges that women might suffer a more severe impact, it fails to systematically unpack how risks are borne differently by different groups and how mitigating the risks of some, could increase the vulnerability of other weaker and more marginalised groups. The paper concludes with practical and political challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve gender justice in R and R policies and programmes. These arguments are developed by drawing on empirical material from ongoing research on gender, displacement and resistance in the Narmada Valley.

*In 1991, I was an observer on a women's meeting in the village of Gadher in Gujarat. Gadher lies on the banks of the Narmada and is Gujarat's largest submerging village. The meeting was being conducted by an NGO that was once actively involved in resettlement and rehabilitation activities around the controversial Sardar Sarovar dam. There were about fifteen women, all Tadvis. There was a discussion of the hopes and aspirations of the women, especially in the light of their impending displacement. The female NGO worker asked the women whether they wanted to move from Gadher, a forest village on the hills, to the plains of Gujarat. She asked them they wanted to continue living in the jungle and face all the hardships of life in a remote hilly village or move to the plains where life would be easier. Were they willing to sacrifice their 'old way of life' in Gadher for five acres of land in Gujarat, a tap near the house, electricity and facilities such as schools and medical dispensaries? Their sons would get jobs, too, and the days of trudging heavy pots of water over the hills from the river for several hours everyday would be over. There was a long discussion about the pros and cons of moving. In some ways, the discussion had a lip service quality to it, because the project-affected of Gujarat were already in the throes of relocation and active resistance to the project was largely absent. This notwithstanding, by and large, the mood was upbeat. The women resolved at the end of the meeting that they would sacrifice their attachments to the land, the river and the forest for the future of their families and sons who would benefit for the five acres of land being provided to every 'major son.' Furthermore, the days of drudgery would be over.*

*Nine years later in 2000, I heard women from Gadher talk about these issues in the course of a women's meeting organised by several resettled women and me. We were in Malu, a resettlement village in Baroda district. I had returned to re-connect with families I had known from my 1991 stay in Gadher.<sup>1</sup> Away from Gadher for over a decade<sup>2</sup>, they could now speak about life in the resettlement sites from first-hand experience. There was a marked difference in their views and perceptions, when compared with what I saw and heard in 1991. They were bitter and cynical and a few were very angry. They were angry about mishaps with land allocation, separation from kith and kin, a constant shortage of money and poor agricultural yields that could not sustain the family. Some of them wanted to go back to Gadher; others wanted to join the protest movement. Most of them were very bitter about the NGOs that had persuaded them to leave Gadher since there was a marked absence of the promised goodies combined with experiences of impoverishment and ill-being hitherto unknown.*

*Another perceptible change was that the women were more vocal about their own problems and concerns. In Gadher, the women were happy to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of their*

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<sup>1</sup> This was as part of ongoing ESCOR-funded research on 'Gender, Displacement and Resistance: Drawing Lessons from the Narmada Experience.' I am grateful to Anand Punja for his valuable assistance and insights. A few sections of the paper draw on Mehta and Srinivasan (2000) and Mehta and Punja (Forthcoming). I thank both my co-authors for the creative, intellectual and ideological synergy that we enjoyed while working together. I also thank Arch Vahini. Most of all, I thank the women and men of Malu and Gadher for their incredible hospitality and warmth and the rural and urban activists of the Narmada Bachao Andolan for their everlasting inspiration.

<sup>2</sup> Initially, displacement was partial with half the family living in the resettlement site and another half living in Gadher. This was the case in 1991, making the whole displacement process highly protracted and traumatic, due to long separations from loved ones. Some families had also tried out other resettlement villages, before finally, and in some cases, out of desperation settling for Malu.

*families and sons. In Malu, there was a heightened sense of gender consciousness and the injustice that they had encountered, both from the state and from their own menfolk. One widow was nearly destitute because her son had grabbed her land and wasn't keen to take care of her. She was now relying on her daughter. A married woman said, Radhaben, said, 'The state has done absolutely nothing for us women. We were not given any land. The five acres of land cannot sustain our families. Money is always short. . We can't cook in a relaxed manner since we no longer have logs of wood from the forest. Our babies are dying due to the absence of good nutrition which we got from the forest. Moreover, the water supply is irregular and erratic and its quality and taste is very questionable. In Gadher, we women earned money by collecting leaves and gum from the forest and from rope and basket making activities. I earned about Rs 5,000 – 8,000 a year. This was my own independent source of income. I don't have this anymore and am totally dependent on my husband for money. He sometimes taunts me and says, 'This is my money and my land. Don't ask me for anything.' Clearly, years of living in the plains combined with all the difficulties, had broken the women's culture of silence. But their double bind had increased.*

## **Introduction**

The last two decades have witnessed an immense surge of literature on the process forced displacement and its far-reaching social, economic and cultural impacts (cf. Thukral 1992; Fernandes and Thukral 1989; Parasuraman 1993; Morse et al 1992; Dreze et al 1997). Despite this vast documentation, national and international debates have been highly ungendered. The project-affected communities have tended to be portrayed in a rather homogenous and undifferentiated way in local and state discourses. The massive changes in the division of labour, in negotiations within communities and households, in property rights and in access to and control over resources clearly affect men and women differently, requiring an analysis through the lens of gender. The malaise of gender-blindness is also found in policy related guidelines concerning resettlement where the settler or oustee is unproblematically assumed to be male. However, beyond the general recognition that women might suffer more than men in the course of the displacement process, there has rarely been a systematic analysis of the gendered dimensions of forced displacement processes and resettlement programmes. A few studies are now beginning to advance our understanding of gender and forced displacement (e.g. Koenig 1995; Mehta and Srinivasan 2000; Mehta 2000; Srinivasan 1997; Parasuraman 1993; Colson 1999). But, largely, in the standard works on displacement and resettlement references to gender have a rather add-on character (e.g. Cernea 1997; McDowell 1997).

In this paper on gender, I draw on my research on gender, displacement and resistance in the Narmada Valley to raise conceptual, practical and political questions around issues of gender, displacement and resettlement policies. As the vignette at the beginning of this paper shows, displaced women are often caught in a double bind. I argue that male and gender biases negatively impact on displaced women in two ways: one the wide-spread nature of male biases in Indian society help perpetuate gender inequality in terms of unequal resource allocation and distribution and also legitimise the silencing of women's interests. Two, biases within state institutions, structures and policies help perpetuate these societal inequalities. This is the double bind that displaced women often find themselves in. While state policies and programmes potentially could remedy inherent gender biases found in the family and wider society, in the

case of resettlement programmes they have failed to do that. Instead, official programmes have mostly exacerbated gender inequalities within displaced communities.

Largely, this occurs due to a very aggregated and undifferentiated notion of the project-affected community in local and state discourses. To some extent, the affected women themselves also contribute to perpetuate the invisibility of gender concerns due to the subordination of their own needs and interests as the 1991 Gadher story indicates. But at times, this culture of silence is broken and gender inequalities are being challenged (the 2000 meeting in Malu). For this culture of silence to be broken, we need to push for emancipatory politics that challenge gender biases at both the level of 'community' as well as in wider state-directed institutions.

Several caveats are in order before I proceed. One, women are not a homogenous entity and there are significant differences amongst women and amongst women and men due to caste, class, tribe and so on. I also do not want to portray displaced women merely as passive agents or victims of development-induced- displacement, state policies and patriarchal structures in their communities. Indeed, there are several examples from my own research of changes that have been positive for women. For example some younger women enjoyed having more leisure time due to the proximity of the taps for water and due to the presence of an electric flour mill.<sup>3</sup> Other women felt that the social control which was so part of life in the old village, was largely absent here and new rules of living and space were being defined. Hence, it was possible for a Tadvī woman to live with a Vasava man, something that would have been much more ostracized in Gadher. Clearly, human beings are capable of tremendous resilience and can adjust to and act upon a wide range of changes. Thus, pains can become gains over a period of time due to people exercising agency in both periods of stress and periods of opportunity as the wider migration literature indicates. But I do wish to stress that R and R programmes have largely failed to make conscious efforts to minimise the loss and traumas encountered by displacement processes, let alone include equity considerations in their activities. Thus, the gains of women and men in the SSP resettlement villages have largely been due to their own grit and determination to make the best of what they received, and not due to any forward-looking planning by state authorities. Finally, the pains of displacement are by no means only restricted to women. Thus there is a need to look at the social relations between men and women, the gendered nature of roles and control over resources and how these change through displacement processes. Still, I believe that often the brunt is borne by women due to the 'double bind' discussed above.

### **Gender, Development and Displacement<sup>4</sup>**

Gender is a powerful social and cultural construct determining the ways in which social relations are structured between men and women. It constitutes the entire ambit of relations that govern the social, cultural and economic exchanges between women and men in different arenas from the household to the community, state and multi-lateral agencies (Jackson and Pearson, 1998). Gender is central to how societies assign roles, responsibilities, resources and rights between women and men (Mehta and Srinivasan 2000).

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<sup>3</sup> Older women, by contrast, thought that this leisure time was not worth the accompanying decline in their standard of living and the fact that the flour did not taste as 'sweet' as it used to when it was ground by hand.

<sup>4</sup> This section draws on Mehta and Srinivasan (2000).

In the past few decades, there has been a growing recognition that development processes such as economic growth are not gender neutral. There is a significant gap in the ways in which the fruits of development are distributed and calculated. Women's unpaid labour has either not been calculated, or benefits have disproportionately been enjoyed by men (cf. Agarwal, 1996; Elson, 1998). This gender gap still exists in both policy and practice.

There is a growing international consensus on the need to achieve gender equality. The Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing emphasised the reduction of gender inequality both as an end in itself and as a contribution towards sustainable development. There is a widespread international consensus on the need to achieve gender equality in development and development co-operation. Other international processes around human rights also make clear commitments to gender equality. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979 explicitly makes a commitment to address uneven social conditions, which have supported discrimination and violence against women (cf. Koenig, 1999). The Human Rights conference in Vienna in 1993 affirmed the interconnectedness of rights from a gender-perspective. This was reiterated in Beijing's Platform for Action, which affirmed the need to see gender rights as human rights. India has also committed to many of these conventions. Despite these international and national commitments, glaring gaps still remain. Often rules that are intended to protect women define women as dependents, rather than as full citizens (cf. Mukhopadhyay 1999). Sometimes this also translates into ad hoc and piecemeal attention to gender issues by state institutions which can often end up marginalising women even more than before, due to wide-spread ignorance of what constitutes gender-sensitive programmes that are suitable to local needs and realities.

A growing constituency has long questioned whether projects that displace and impoverish thousands of poor people in the name of development can be justified (Fernandes and Thukral 1989; Kothari 1996; Thukral 1992). It is questionable whether the pains of a large silent majority can be legitimised due to the benefits accrued by a vocal minority. Feminist scholars have also contributed to these debates. They have challenged the notion that development can be equated with economic growth and that the well being of all humans will be assured with economic growth. Feminists have challenged this assumption in two ways. Firstly they assert that the drive towards growth should not detract attention from attempts at redistribution to meet the basic requirements of all (cf. Kabeer, 1994: 75). Thus, growth or development, which proceeds in an unequal way, cannot meet equity goals or lead to social and economic justice for all women and men. For development to achieve equity goals it has to be fair and just. It must necessarily entail a process of redistribution where the costs and benefits are equally borne by men and women; by the powerful and powerless.

Gender analysts also point to how the costs of so-called projects are borne differently by women and men. As several studies have elaborated, vulnerable communities like women and children tend to be impacted by displacement in ways that require an evaluation that goes beyond the monetary loss of land (Colson, 1999; Thukral, 1996; Parasuraman, 1993 and 1997; Srinivasan, 1997; World Bank, 1993). Additionally, in an already unequal context, disparities tend to get further exacerbated (Thukral, 1996).

### **Male and Planners' Biases in Conceptualising Displacement and R and R Processes**

Resettlement, it is acknowledged, is a traumatic experience for most communities. (Cernea, 1997; Morse et al 1992). 'Resettlement involves a re-ordering of gender relations across a wide spectrum, but that re-ordering emerges from previous assumptions about gender and the gendered experience of those involved, says Colson (1999, 26). Efforts towards resettlement and rehabilitation may also be flawed in terms of their understanding of gender and changing gender roles entailed by displacement. Gender-blind policies, gender assumptions and roles embedded in social and cultural practices in affected communities, also work to the disadvantage of women. Both men and women experience disempowerment due to being uprooted. However, women are often at the receiving end of the transitions visited upon communities especially in relation to the domestic sphere and the market. In a similar vein, Colson argues: "When people are uprooted because their land is wanted for economic reasons usually associated with visions of national development, their multiple identities tend to disappear: they become ungendered, uprooted, and are dealt with as undifferentiated families or households' (1999, 25).

Several male biases underscore the way in which displacement is conceived, and consequently, the way R and R policies and programmes are designed and implemented. To some extent, many of the biases outlined below are not merely encountered by women. Poor dispossessed adivasi men also suffer because planners do not understand customary law, the importance of common property resources (CPRs) and the intricacies of the forest economy. Some of these issues have been extensively documented (e.g. Morse et al 1992; TISS 1997). What follows is a focus on male biases in displacement and R and R processes.

### **1) The Project-Affected-Person or 'oustee'**

The oustee is usually conceived to be a male householder. For example, a Malaysian report on resettlement refers to 'the settlers, their children and their wives' and the wives are not counted as worthy to be given any employment.<sup>5</sup> The male is thus considered to be a breadwinner and the woman a dependent and server. The Indian Land Acquisition Act explicitly states that "if the 'person interested' is not available to receive the notice for acquisition then it may be handed over to, or served on, any other adult male member who resides with him. If no 'adult male' is present then the notice may be placed on the outer door of the house or in some conspicuous place in the office of the collector or court house, etc. In other words, if a notice is served on a woman, it is not legal" (Thukral 1996, 1500). This blatant neglect of women's citizenship rights in the law, finds its way to actual resettlement practices. For example, women widowed before 1980 have not been granted oustee status by the SSP rehabilitation policy in Gujarat (Bhatia 1998).

### **2) The definition of the household**

Gender scholars have demonstrated that the household is not 'a unit of congruent interests' (e.g. Agarwal, 1994: 3 where resources are shared equitably by all its members. Hence, women's

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<sup>5</sup> '...Unlike the settlers, their wives and children are not given any specific task or counted as part of the holdings labour force..' (Bahrin n.d. 63).

needs and interests require a specific priority focus in practice and policy for development to be truly gender-just.

But policy makers tend to treat the household like a blackbox, instead of a site of both ‘conflict and co-operation’ (cf. Sen 1990) where diverging interests may exist amongst different household members according to age, gender and so on. There is also the assumption that benefits directed to men will automatically be transferred to all household members. There is a marked lack of recognition of the unequal nature of resource allocation, be it around nutrition, health benefits or schooling, within the household, something which feminist scholars have been documenting for years. Bina Agarwal’s pathbreaking research on women’s land rights demonstrates how the idea of a harmonious household persists as a narrative in policy discourse. The following quote of the then Minister of Agriculture from NorthWest India tells it all: ‘Are you suggesting that women should be given rights in land? What do women want? To break up the family?’ (Cited in Agarwal 2002). Yet, the push to cling onto the narrative of a unitary household succeeds in perpetuating gender injustice and discrimination and the failure to advocate rights for women (ibid). The Draft R and R policy of 1994 also draws on a homogenous and undifferentiated notion of the family which lacks an explicit recognition of women’s needs, interests and rights.

### **3) The nature of loss**

Recent work focusing in particular on the gendered dimensions of dams has argued that traditional cost-benefit analyses, which emerged to identify and measure the costs or profits emerging out of infrastructure projects such as dams, are silent about hidden costs and intangible issues entering into the socio-cultural domain (Mehta and Srinivasan 2000). Gender scholars have also largely been sceptical of mainstream and reductionist ways of measuring distribution and costs and benefits. From a gender point of view, a balance sheet approach uses dominant modes of enquiry which could serve to legitimise unequal distribution of resources (Elson, 1997), as it is premised on dominant relations. Infrastructure projects have costs and benefits that can be environmental, social or economic in nature. The cost-benefit analysis was specifically designed to identify and measure the costs or profits emerging out of projects such as dams. While direct economic costs or benefits are easy to calculate, how do these analyses fare with respect to capturing intangible issues such as changes in socio-cultural identity and geographical space, crucial for a community’s sense of well-being? Not very well, argues a growing constituency of critics of conventional cost/benefit analysis and balance sheet approaches (e.g. Kabeer, 1994 and Elson 1998 from a gender perspective, and The Cornerhouse (1998) from an environmental perspective).

These analyses display a market bias in valuing costs and benefits. Given that markets are not neutral but are ideological sites laden with social and power relations, certain issues might be valued more than others (e.g. irrigated land is probably valued more than common property land or men’s economic activities receive greater value than that of women). Two, it is often impossible to put a “cost” or price to intangibles such as the loss of livelihood strategies which are non-monetised and may never have entered the market-place in the first place. Women’s lives and activities are often centred around these intangibles – making it very difficult to



calculate the gendered nature of loss and costs and benefits when conventional approaches are used (see Mehta and Srinivasan 2000).

#### **4) The nature of assets and ownership**

Most policies around compensation tend to focus on formal arrangements of tenure and asset ownership. Thus, for example, they focus on formal titles to land which certainly disadvantage adivasis communities who are not entitled to compensation. Similarly, the neglect of assets such as river resources, access to CPRs often fail to compensate displaced people for their livelihood base. For example, the fisherfolk and sand quarry workers in the Maheshwar area own no land, but as they argue, 'their land' is the Narmada which gives them 'gold' in the form of sand, fish and crops which are cultivated on her banks (Interviews conducted in February 2002). Largely policies and programmes neglect informal and non-encoded rights, assets and institutions. However women largely have rights and control over resources in customary law or informal arrangements. For example, land rights can be both formal and governed by customary law. Often women have rights to property, water and land in informal institutional arrangements which might be corroded by the creation of new formal institutions to govern land and water resources. Many newly created institutions might be male-dominated and might not enhance women's bargaining power. This will further erode the in some cases, minimal rights, that women do enjoy within informal institutions, for example, women's control over their income from forest resources. Ideally institutional arrangements should (a) not aggravate existing gender discrimination (b) create flexible alternatives to deal with gender inequality and (c) initiate processes that work towards enhancing women's choices, even if it means being partisan towards the empowerment of women (Mehta and Srinivasan 2000).

Bina Agarwal (2002) for example sees resettlement schemes as a way to potentially correct existing inequalities in land ownership in India. But she too admits that when land transfers take place, land is usually allotted almost exclusively to males, even to the extent of corroding matrilineal arrangements (Agarwal 2002: 11). Schemes such as the SSP perpetuate existing male biases in ownership. In fact, as I demonstrate in the next section, they even increase the vulnerability of some women.

#### **5) Conceptualising well-being**

Consider these two quotes. The first is by a resettlement official who says: "The oustees are far better off in the resettlement site. The women do not have to face the same drudgery they did in the jungle because they have taps near their homes. Their health has also improved. They are better off than before." By contrast a Tadvi woman says, "We are very unhappy since we've moved to the resettlement site. The water supply is very irregular and it tastes awful, too. Our babies are dying and we feel weak and sick. Away from the forest and river economy, we feel worse off (cited in Mehta and Punja Forthcoming)."

These quotes, one from a resettlement official, and the other from a displaced woman, are talking about the same resettlement village. Yet, the gap in perceptions about the oustees' well being is glaring. Well-being, in the traditional approach, is often defined as physical needs deprivation due to private consumption shortfalls (largely with respect to food) (Schaffer 1996:24). By

contrast the more participatory and qualitative approaches would focus on a much broader conception of ill-being/ deprivation including, 'physical, social, economic, political and psychological/ spiritual elements' (Chambers 1995: vi). Moreover, the capability approach would also focus on the freedoms that people enjoy (Sen 1999). Thus, sources of both well-being and ill-being include income and non-income sources of entitlements, social relations of consumption and production and the more qualitative aspects of security, autonomy, self-respect and dignity.

Largely, official R and R policies and programmes tend to focus on the consumption of traded goods or incomes. They ignore natural resources and the consumption of non-monetary goods and services (e.g. Baulch 1996; Razavi 1999), along with the socio-cultural values that are placed upon them by individuals. As the quotes above demonstrate, officials often fail to understand the multidimensional aspects of well-being and therefore fail to understand why displaced people cannot be content with the compensation packages offered to them which largely focus on material goods (Mehta and Punja Forthcoming). For example, under community benefits the SSP website lists the reconstruction of economic livelihoods as a priority. There is no mention of autonomy, security, freedom, choice and so on. Similarly, R and R officials have never understood *adivasi* attachments to the Narmada and the ways in which people link their personal and family's well-being to the river. I would argue that often even pathbreaking scholars such as Michael Cernea tend to focus on more conventional aspects of well-being and less on rights and socio-cultural aspects of well-being. The next section presents a gendered analysis of Cernea's Risks and Reconstruction Model.

These arguments are of course applicable to all displaced people, who feel a sense of alienation and loss. Men in Malu speak equally evocatively of the common property resources, forest herbs and medicines of Gadher and how their absence has led to a decline in physical strength and a sense of alienation in the plains (see Mehta and Punja Forthcoming for further details). To some extent, men are even more vocal and expressive about their ill-being than women, presumably due to their greater exposure to outsiders and higher degree of articulateness. But this should not detract from the fact that women are more likely to bear the brunt of increasing ill-being because the gender division of labour dictates that women are the ones that provide the food, water, fuelwood etc. Thus the scarcity of these resources, makes their daily routine more difficult. Moreover, since their rights and realms of control are largely in informal arenas, their ill-being is difficult to quantify and capture in conventional analyses.

At the psycho-social level, since women's lives are largely centred around the domestic realm and the family, they may have fewer outlets than men to cope with vulnerability, insecurity etc. due to their restricted mobility (cf. Thukral 1996; Parasuraman 1993). In Malu, alcohol consumption has increased, as have conflicts between families and within families. This is because the settlers now live in a compact space by contrast to the spread out living arrangements in the forest village and the scramble for scarce resources is often intense. Moreover, the adulterated alcohol of Baroda district has more severe impacts on the body than the locally-brewed alcohol of Gadher. Violence amongst men and against women has increased, and it is not difficult to imagine that women can often become handy scapegoats in such scenarios (Colson 1999). Police violence and brutality in the course of forced evictions and during protest actions also contravene local notions of women's 'dignity' and 'self-respect' and

the long-term impacts on women can be highly damaging (e.g. the rape of the tribal activist Budhiben who ultimately met with a tragic end).

### **Gender and the Impoverishment Risks of Displacement**

There is now a growing consensus in the standard literature on R and R, that displacement processes lead to a decline in the stand of living of displaced people and also heightened impoverishment (WCD 2000; Cernea 1997; McDowell 1997; Mathur and Marsden 1998). As Ramanathan says, ‘ Mass displacement (...) is a prescription for impoverishment’ (1996 1490). She draws on Baxi’s definition which describes processes in public decision-making which make the impoverishment of some people fair and just. In this process, people not naturally poor are made poor (ibid). As the vast literature on displacement has documented, this largely happens because the incomes and livelihoods of the displaced collapse.

Micheal Cernea’s groundbreaking work presents a model to explain how impoverishment occurs through displacement. But he does not merely stop there. He also presents operational tools to mitigate the risks of displacement (Cernea 1997; 1998). Through the study of countless empirical studies, Cernea identified eight key risks. They are landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, increased morbidity, food insecurity, loss of access to common property, social disarticulation (Cernea 1997). Together these risks constitute the Impoverishment Risks Model. The basic idea is that if these risks are built into the planning process, they can be anticipated in advance and even minimised or mitigated through advance planning. His model is now widely used in resettlement research (see for example, the book by Mathur and Marsden 1998) and one of its aims is to help operationalise a just planning process around resettlement (Cernea 1997: 1571 and 1998).

However, even this very important work fails to adequately incorporate gender concerns systematically. [While there is a brief and explicit acknowledgement of the](#) variances in risks content and intensity for women and for other [vulnerable categories in his work \(e.g. Cernea 2000\), largely the displaced community is portrayed in a rather homogenous way throughout the analysis, both in terms of the impacts of risks as well as in the reconstruction strategies.](#) In fact, its analysis is premised on the notion of a unitary displaced community (see Punja 2001). Assumptions of homogeneity are apparent in the following sentence: “The model anticipates displacement’s major risks, explains the behavioural responses of displaced people, and can guide the reconstruction of resettlers’ livelihoods” (Cernea 1997: 1570). But as the preceding sections demonstrated, displaced women and men often have diverging and competing interests. Moreover, impoverishment risks impact differently on women and men and different groups will respond differently to risks. While this is acknowledged by Cernea, the analysis does not tease out how the elimination of risks for one group, may increase the vulnerability and risks of another group. Including a gender dimension to analyses of displacement, thus, may introduce an element of unruliness, but we might be presented with a somewhat more realistic and dynamic picture of on-the-ground realities. Secondly, Cernea’s model tends to focus largely on socioeconomic systems that productive in a monetary sense. Productive systems with symbolic or qualitative value, but without monetary or income value, may not be picked up (Punja 2001). However the tasks performed by women, essential to production, consumption and, indeed, the well-being of the household often cannot

be given an income value (ibid). Cernea, while acknowledging the limitation of the cost-benefit analysis in 1997, in more recent work has also argued for the need for more economic-oriented research to be conducted to quantify ‘loss’, given that resettlement studies have been dominated by sociological and anthropological analyses and economists have not adequately concerned themselves with R and R.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, he argues that resettlement schemes are grossly underfinanced (1999). Thus he argues for growth-oriented resettlement (1999, p. 23). While this might clearly help direct more time and attention to resettlement planning, it may also further reinforce the policy-makers tendency to the balance-sheet approach and it is not very clear how intangible socio-cultural losses will be captured by economics analyses.<sup>7</sup> The following analysis shows how a gendered approach to risks and reconstruction would pay attention to (a) the ways in which some groups bear more risks over others; and (b) the intangible and non-material nature of the risks, given that in rural areas, at least, women’s realm of work is informal and subsistence-oriented. Let me demonstrate both these issues by examining two of the risks identified by Cernea.

#### **a) Landlessness<sup>8</sup>**

Cernea writes, ‘Expropriation of land removes the main foundation upon which people’s productive systems, commercial activities, and livelihoods are constructed. This is the principla form of decapitalization and pauperization of displaced people... Unless the land basis of people’s productive systems is reconstructed elsewhere, or replaced with steady income-generating employment, landlessness sets in and the affected families become impoverished’ (1998: 1572). He cites numerous studies where landlessness increases and then incomes drop significantly.

This is a very important conclusion and clearly very important given the current tendency in Madhya Pradesh to disregard the ‘land-for-land’ principle. But should we merely be concerned with landlessness? In the case of Sardar Sarovar oustees in Gujarat, even though each project-affected family was officially granted five acres of land, the resettlers surveyed by us felt that there had been a significant reduction in land assets. In Gadher, they had access to land with titles (*khata ni jamin*), wasteland (*kharaba jamin*), forest land, deemed as illegally encroached by the state (*jungle jamin*) and riverbed land. On an average, each family had about 18 acres of land in Gadher (Study Survey). However, the decline in the quantity of land was not merely what contributed to the oustees’ impoverishment. The quality of land provided was problematic. In Gadher people grew a vast variety of crops ranging from *makai* (corn) to three types of *jowar* (*lal, moti and hybrid*) (sorghum), *bajra* (pearl Millet), *tuvar* (split pea lentil), *mug* (moong), grains such as *urad, kodra, bunti, bhedi, mor, kang, divelia, matia*, rice, some cotton and tal (sesame). As the land was hilly and stony, the run off of water was good. Land in Gadher was known as *Garam Jamin* (hot land) because it dried and warmed up quickly. Even when the rains are not sufficient, harvests seem to be greater than what we saw in Malu. For example, in lean

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<sup>6</sup> See Hackenberg for a wry critique of Cernea’s call for interdisciplinary hybridity (1999).

<sup>7</sup> For methodological debates on these issues within the SSP context see the EPW articles by Whitehead and Sah.

<sup>8</sup> The data presented here is from field research conducted by me and Anand Punja in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh in 2000 and 20001.

years the yields in Gadher are almost double for corn and *jowar* (Household survey, study research).

Moreover, the land in Malu produces only four crops as opposed to the many diverse crops in Gadher, which not only provided a nutritious balanced diet, but also a change from the “monotonous” meals which they now eat (largely *jowar*, rice and *tuvar*). There was also much more seasonal variation. For example *jowar* was eaten in the summer because it has a cooling effect on the system, whereas *bajra* (pearl millet) was considered appropriate for the colder winter months. The more traditional grains of *kodra*, *bunti*, *bhedi* and *danger* were an important part of the resettlers’ diet in Gadher. These crops were vital in times of scarcity and drought due to their resistance to rot. They have a high nutritional value and high diversity. It is this lack of diversity in nutritional intake which probably explains why the resettlers complain of reduced immunity (a point acknowledged by Cernea in his risk on food insecurity and morbidity.)

As the quantity of land available is not as extensive as it in Gadher (given the extensive use of forest and common property for cultivation in the old village), resettlers are much more reliant on the shop for food. However, their purchasing power is also low given the rising costs. They also have learnt to do without milk, ghee and the very many forest products that they got free of cost in the submergence village. During lean periods, they experience more difficulties than they did in Gadher. For example, in the year of fieldwork the penultimate rains, crucial for a good *jowar* harvest, failed. The villagers predicted a drought accompanied by forced out-migration, indebtedness and a shortage of cash. By contrast, the impact of droughts in Gadher was less severe. Fall back options such as forest herbs and roots, livestock produce, fishing etc. existed which are absent in Malu (Mehta and Punja, Forthcoming).

These multiple characteristics of the way changes in the land contributed to people’s impoverishment and growing sense of ill-being, cannot be captured by the term ‘landless.’ Thus merely preventing the risk of landlessness through land –based relocation strategies (Cernea 1997: 1578) merely will not solve the problem of impoverishment. But this is precisely what the Nigam claims to be one of the strengths of the SSP R and R package since from their point of view, many so-called landless have been given land. But they fail to understand that the land provided cannot provide resettled men and women the same nutritional intake, diversity of crops and risk-aversion strategies vis-à-vis drought as the land in Gadher did.

Another problem around operationalising the land-based risk is the need to differentiate between women and men and how they perceive the risks of landlessness. In Gadher, many women, especially from the Vasava community, had their own plots of land in the forest, where they would grow vegetables and spices. They made all the cropping decisions and controlled the use of these crops, which largely was for subsistence purposes. This gave them a level of autonomy in the household’s production system. In the resettlement village, they had no land rights whatsoever. Landlessness for them meant greater insecurity than for men since the policy ‘officially’ made men the beneficiaries and robbed the women of informal rights over land and forest resources. This also increased the vulnerability of widows, divorced women and female-headed households who were not awarded any land. The Indian Succession Act is supposed to allocate half of the assets to women in the event of separation or divorce. Even though these rights are legal, they are rarely practised and socially accepted. One way to legitimise these

rights, would be if women were made joint owners of the land, or if the five acres had been divided between the women and men in the form of independent land holdings.

Women were not even considered full independent beings in the process of land allocation and selection. They were neither consulted by officials nor by their husbands in decision-making processes around land allocation. Their participation was next to nothing. In hindsight, an NGO worker acknowledged that had the women been consulted earlier on, many sites would have been rejected by them outright due to their inability to sustain people's livelihoods. Men, in fact, admitted to me that had women been consulted and involved in the process of village selection, many of the hardships in the resettlement sites would have been averted (Mehta 2000).

Minimising the risks of some might increase the risks of others. The SSP package in Gujarat correctly endows major sons with 5 acres of land. But major daughters receive nothing, thus increasing their vulnerability in the case of desertion or separation. Even married women face insecurity and risks, hitherto unknown. A woman who had remarried feared that she would be denied rights to the land, once her ailing husband died. Had the land ownership been independent or even joint, this insecurity would not have existed. Another woman, Rewaben, was widowed after moving to the resettlement village. During the transfer period, she was tricked into signing over her land into her son's name who threatened to throw her out of the house. She felt that struggles like this over land would not have occurred in Gadher because the monetary value placed on land was largely absent and because it was common for women to have control, if not own, resources from the forest and some plots of land. Resources were also not perceived to be so scarce. Thus while, major sons may welcome being considered beneficiaries of the SSP compensation package, for many women, in particular widows or older women, this may mean greater risk. This calls for the need to unpack who bears more risks and how risk mitigation for some may increase the risks for others.

#### **b) Loss of access to common property**

Cernea rightly acknowledges that the loss of common property (i.e. forested lands, water bodies, grazing lands, burial grounds etc) results in significant deterioration in income and livelihood (1997: 1575). He also states that rarely do project authorities restore a community's access to common property.

In my research, the loss of CPRs had devastating impacts on both men and women. However, due to the division of labour which made women in charge of reproductive tasks for the household, women felt the impact more severely. Take changes in water and fuel sources. For women this was a daily opportunity to be with their friends and get away from the men in the household. Women would always go between 2 – 4 times daily to collect water and fuelwood. The bureaucrats however believe that by reducing these daily trips, especially in the hills, they have improved the lives of women by taking away the drudgery involved in these household tasks. However, these tasks were performed autonomously by women and gave them a sense of control over the household's functioning (Interviews in Malu).

Water lies at the centre of the the resettlers' ill-being. The changing water world of displaced people in Gujarat has led to a decline in their sense of well being because the once taken for granted freedoms around water - central to their life - have been taken away. A free flowing

river, which gave them 24-hour access, has been replaced by a variety of unreliable sources that provide water for very short periods. Resettlers have little control over the operation or maintenance of these taps or indeed the quantity of water available daily. Even though there are several standpoints and taps around the site, the water supply is not as reliable. Water arrives for about twenty minutes every day with no predictability in the quantity or time. The autonomy that women enjoyed in collecting water whenever they wanted has been lost. Instead, they are dependent on the government, host villagers and their menfolk for their daily supply.

Moreover, the quality of the water is also highly problematic; illnesses such as diarrhoea, vomiting and other water-borne diseases are quite rampant in the resettlement village. My research in this area also showed that the poor quality of water has also led to an increase in mortality. The majority of households within Malu have lost family members in the village, especially children. The number of children dying in the 0 – 1 year group was double that of the host village. In the 1 – 5 year age group, it was nearly six times higher. The family that looked after me while I stayed there lost two children, their son from septicemia in August 2000 and in November, their grand-daughter died at nine months. In addition, everybody, including adults, spoke of reduced immunity and weakness. The mixing of different water sources everyday and the lack of forest vegetables and herbs seemed to contribute to their frailty.

Moreover, the absence of forest-based work led to women having more leisure time, but it also led to a decline in women's control over her own income. R and R policies did not pay cognizance to the crucial role that minor forest produce played in the lives of the displaced people, in particular women. There were very few provisions to compensate for the loss of such activities and the independent income that women earned from minor forest produce (about Rs 5000 a year). This is because the role of women in the forest-based economy had totally been overlooked by policy-makers. Many of the newly introduced schemes for women such as tailoring, spinning, file-making and wall-hanging and candle manufacture had not proven to be a source of gainful employment for women. Their success was also marginal, not least because they were rather divorced from the life realities of adivasi women. Apart from serving to propagate the notion of women performing typical "female" tasks, such schemes undermined the economic role of *adivasi* women in the forest-based economy (Mehta 2000) and their dependence on their menfolk has also increased (as the vignette in the beginning of this essays shows).

If a community is not viewed in a disaggregated fashion, women's links with CPRs will not be acknowledged and compensation packages will not explicitly target women's interests in packages that seek to compensate for the loss of CPRs. The result could be diminished autonomy of women, their increased vulnerability and also an increasing sense of ill-being for the whole family, given women's pivotal role in household reproduction and as men in Malu admitted to me ten years after relocation. Also Cernea's approach fails to explicitly recognise the symbolic dimensions of CPRs. Indeed, it is their cultural politics that often mobilise struggles against forced displacement.

### **Is gender justice possible in processes of forced displacement and resettlement?**

One could argue that since forced displacement leads to new social relations and changes in the allocation and distribution of resources, potentially there is the scope for inserting just and

equitable patterns of resource allocation amongst women and men. These in turn could help undermine the cultural biases in a society that work against women. In this way, if designed sensitively R and R programmes could contribute to gender justice, e.g. through investing land and water rights to women and the landless. The Draft R and R policy of 1998 seeks to award displaced people land in the command area of irrigation schemes. This could certainly contribute to balancing out interests between the losers and winners of infrastructure projects that entail displacement. However, it could be more partisan in enhancing women's rights.

Policies and programmes are not neutral or apolitical. The policy process is moulded by power relations at all stages (ie from formulation to implementation). Policies are also 'framed' in certain ways, often to serve powerful interests and to obfuscate complexities, e.g. the notion of 'public purpose' in the LAA begs the question, who constitutes the public? Whose interests are privileged and so on. The fact that India still lacks a national policy or law on R and R, despite over a decade of debate, lobbying and consultations with civil society demonstrates the highly politicized nature of displacement and resettlement processes in India today. In such a context, the non-formulation of the policy and law is in itself suspect.

Against this backdrop, is it an oxymoron to ask whether gender justice can be achieved in R and R policies and programmes? For justice is premised around notions of equity, rights and emancipation, issues not normally associated with forced displacement and R and R. In India, R and R programmes have failed to meet even the practical (read: material) needs of women. Can we expect them to address strategic interests that would challenge the gendered status quo and bring out significant changes in the way material and symbolic resources are distributed and conceived between men and women?

If R and R can ever be seen as a 'development opportunity' (Marsden and Mathur 1998), and this in itself is questionable, it will need radical reconceptualisation. I have elsewhere, along with Bina Srinivasan, provided specific recommendations towards achieving gender justice and equality in large dam construction (Mehta and Srinivasan 2000). They are also applicable for gender, displacement and resettlement policies and I reproduce in an adapted form:

1. Agencies involved in R and R activities should be commitment to achieving gender equality in the project areas.
2. The notion of the project-affected-person needs to be gender-inclusive. Thus, interventions should be targeted at both women and men. With respect to resettlement this would mean that women and men should be co-beneficiaries of the compensation packages awarded to households. At times, independent rights may need to be awarded to married women. Single and widowed women must always receive individual compensation.
3. Developmental processes that infringe upon the human rights of any section of society are inimical to the long-term goals of progress. Forced displacement cannot take place with the use of coercion and force. It is important to set up human rights monitoring institutions and ensure the protection of the human rights of the affected population. As women are generally more vulnerable to manipulation by the state and other agencies, special care should be taken to ensure that women are not subjected to any kind of violence as a result of large dams.



4. Project planners and managers should not just interact with leaders and elites who are usually men. Instead, women's networks and interest groups should be given a priority in consultative processes involving the affected communities. If local male leaders resist the formation of women's groups, additional time and effort will have to be invested in dealing with on-the-ground gender biases and stereotypes. Extension workers should be gender-aware.
5. Policy formulation should take into account the varied roles that women play in the domestic sphere and should be flexible enough to accommodate this in the consultation process. For example, if women are not able to attend village level meetings due to domestic or other chores, care should be taken to schedule meetings at their convenience. Policy should not merely pay lip service to gender representation at meetings; it should have mechanisms to ensure the full participation of women. As is often the case, women are not used to partaking of public spaces. Resettlement policy should therefore be sensitive to women's use of space and accommodate their specific needs in such cases. Gender-sensitive policies will ensure that women can articulate their fears and apprehensions without intimidation from state, community or agencies.
6. A clear commitment to gender justice will ensure that women do not have to bear a disproportionate cost in developmental processes. Thus, there is a need for greater awareness of existing gender roles, relations and biases in the project areas. Care should be taken to minimise existing inequalities in gendered access to and control over resources. Under no circumstance, should R and R projects exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Project appraisal should be sensitive to, and take account of the gender division of labour in the household and community. It should include gender impacts on social practices like shared labour and the consequences of fragmentation of kinship support systems.
7. Gender mainstreaming is indispensable as a means of integrating gender into dam policy, planning and implementation. For this it is important to generate gender-specific indicators that take into account the varied locations of men and women at all levels of society. Gender mainstreaming will help to avoid the omissions that characterise existing R and R policy.
8. It is essential to generate detailed gender-specific data of affected communities in all project impact areas. There is an urgent need for detailed long-term studies investigating gender/displacement linkages. Risk mitigation and rights promotion can take place for effectively for women will data and knowledge exist. Similarly, the costs borne currently by women in the affected communities can be minimised if R and R policy is based on gender-specific empirical studies. Studies should be undertaken before displacement processes take place and should be part of the planning process itself. Pari passu gender studies would defeat the purpose of mitigating costs and enhancing benefits. Therefore, they should be ruled out.
9. To pursue equity goals, agencies might have to be partisan in planning processes. For example, enhancing equitable rights to land and explicitly targeting poor people's land would help reduce some of the existing inequalities in irrigation systems and thus enhance the food security of the poor. Other interventions could include instituting land reform during the construction of irrigation facilities or vesting water rights to the landless.
10. Gender empowering goals should be built into policy. Women's land and water rights should be part of the discourse. Where existing national and international legal provisions militate against women's autonomy and control, they should be amended to rectify the damages caused to women.
11. Project planners need to be sensitive to local understandings of equity. Often ignorance of customary law and local use understandings of access to and control over resources can undermine the existing

rights that women or indigenous people's have over resources, in particular in informal institutional arrangements.

12. Cost benefit analysis should not be used in decision-making processes or as tools for negotiations. This is because they fail to capture the intangible social, cultural impacts. As such costs/benefit analysis mirror the interests of the powerful and mask the losses faced by constituencies that lack voice and political clout. Analyses should have a broader understanding of the multi-faceted nature of losses incurred by project- affected communities

(extracted with some modifications from Mehta and Srinivasan 2000: 33-34).

There is also the need to focus more explicitly on displaced people's rights instead of their risks. As people's struggles against displacement show, displaced women and men resist forced displacement primarily because their rights to livelihood, information, shelter, dignity, development etc. have been denied. Gender justice can be achieved if there is a conscious effort to move towards emancipatory politics. But the focus on emancipation as opposed to the mere welfare of displaced women is bound to encounter resistance both within local communities and in state institutions due to the 'double bind.' . In Maheshwar, M.P., the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) has now created the Narmada Shakti Dal, a women's movement within the larger movement to stop the dam. When the women decided to tackle the alcohol problem amongst their own men, they met with tremendous opposition since the taken-for-granted gendered ordering of everyday life was being challenged and battles are still being waged on this issue. But key activists acknowledge the need to be partisan towards women's needs, even if that may undermine the strategic portrayal of a community unified to stop the dam (Interviews with Silvy/ Geeta in February 2002).<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, many male rural activists within the NBA have gradually come to revise some of their traditional views of women's roles and responsibilities and claim that they respect their women more than before. They are also happy to lift some of the earlier restrictions imposed on women's mobility and articulation, though very few of them in reality would want to change the existing gender division of labour within the household (Interviews in February 2002). To some extent, the changed perception around gender justice/injustice has to do with the actual gains that they have accrued from women's active role in the struggle and from the role model provided by urban women activists. Still the seeds of change have been sown amongst oustee populations protesting the Narmada project. We can only hope that similar changes will be witnessed in the policy process around R and R and that gender-just outcomes will gradually emerge both in policy and practice.

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<sup>9</sup> This is different to what I observed in the early nineties, see Mehta 2000. However, I now believe that my conclusions did not adequately acknowledge the ambiguities and contradictions in the long path to gender justice and failed to look at gender issues in struggles diachronically, instead of a snapshot perspective.

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