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Q14

Rehabilitation of human settlements is one of the important environmental impacts which always attracts controversy while planning major projects. Discuss the measures suggested for mitigation of this impact while proposing major developmental projects.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS III · 12 marks · Environment and Conservation

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Core demand of the question

- Treat rehabilitation of settlements as a core environmental and social impact of big projects
- Explain why it causes controversy
- Discuss mitigation measures in law and in project design, including LARR and EIA

Revision summary

Moving human settlements is a core social-environmental impact of dams, mines, and urban projects.

Controversy grows when users of commons are left out and colonies lack water and work.

LARR 2013, SIA, consent, NRRP 2007, and EIA 2006 are the main legal mitigation tools.

Forest Rights and gram sabha consent matter on forest land.

Services and livelihoods must exist before displacement, with a budget inside the project cost.

Introduction

A dam, a mine, a highway, or an industrial park often needs land that is already a **village, a forest hamlet, or an urban slum**. Moving people is not a side effect; it is an **environmental and livelihood impact** because house, common land, temple, and job move together. Controversy follows when numbers are under-counted, consent is thin, and "resettlement" is a distant plot without water. Mitigation has to be designed **before** clearance, not as a riot-control afterthought.

Body**Why rehabilitation attracts controversy**

- **Loss is** multidimensional: farmland, grazing, fishing, forest produce, and social networks, not only a roof.
- **Adivasi and Dalit** households are over-represented in submergence and mining belts; legal forest rights may be ignored if the count starts from a faulty revenue record.
- Promises of jobs and house plots are **delayed or diluted** once the reservoir fills or the plant is commissioned.

- Urban projects (metro, coastal road, riverfront) evict without calling it "displacement", which breeds the same conflict.
- Past scars - **Narmada**, large irrigation, and mining in central India - make every new Environmental Impact Assessment a trust test, not a form.

Measures suggested while proposing major projects

- **Avoid and minimise:** site the dam, alignment, or park to cut displacement; a slightly costlier alignment that saves a dense settlement is mitigation, not luxury.
- **Social Impact Assessment** under the **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013**: public hearing, assessment of livelihoods, and a public **SIA report** before acquisition in the cases the Act covers.
- **Consent:** the 2013 Act requires consent of a **high share of affected families** for private and public-private projects (with listed exceptions). Using exceptions as the default recreates controversy.
- **Compensation and R&R package:** land for land where possible, house in a **resettlement colony** with roads, drinking water, school, anganwadi, and electricity **before** displacement; annuity or jobs as written entitlements, not verbal hope.
- **National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007** already asked for a rehabilitation plan as part of the project; the 2013 Act gives that policy more teeth where it applies.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment Notification, 2006:** public consultation, management plan, and **Environmental Management Plan** that must include R&R monitoring, not only stack emissions.
- **Forest Rights Act, 2006** and gram sabha processes in forest land: no diversion on a false "uninhabited" certificate.
- **Independent monitoring:** a rehabilitation commissioner, third-party audit, and a grievance cell with a timeline; World Bank and Asian Development Bank safeguard language is useful even for domestic finance if it is actually followed.
- **Livelihood restoration:** skill, credit, and access to fisheries or share in irrigation from the same dam; a plot without a job is not rehabilitation.
- **Cultural and common property:** graveyards, temples, grazing, and burial grounds need replacement, or social conflict will outlast the civil work.
- **Staged displacement tied to staged construction:** no filling of a reservoir until the colony is live.
- **Urban equivalent:** in-situ upgradation or nearby rehousing with tenure, not a far peri-urban dump.

What project reports should show at proposal stage

- A **census of affected persons** including tenants, forest users, and women-headed houses.
- A **budget line** for R&R inside the project cost, not a leftover.
- A **timeline** aligned with the construction schedule, with a stop-work clause if R&R slips.

Flow diagram

Major project -> Displacement of settlements
Displacement of settlements -> Controversy if undercounted
Avoid minimise SIA LARR EIA -> Livelihood and live colony
Displacement of settlements -> Avoid minimise SIA LARR EIA
Forest Rights gram sabha -> Avoid minimise SIA LARR EIA

Conclusion

Rehabilitation is a central impact of major projects because it breaks homes and commons. Controversy is the symptom of under-counting and late, poor colonies. Mitigation is avoid-minimise-restore: honest **SIA**, LARR 2013 consent and packages, EIA public hearing, Forest Rights, live services before move, and livelihood, not only a tin roof. A project that cannot fund that package is not ready for clearance.

Facts & figures

LARR Act 2013

Land acquisition law that pairs compensation with rehabilitation and resettlement and requires Social Impact Assessment in covered cases.

EIA Notification 2006

Environmental clearance process with public consultation and an environmental management plan for listed projects.

NRRP 2007

National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy that asked for a rehabilitation plan as part of project design.

Forest Rights Act 2006

Recognises forest dwellers' rights; diversion of forest land without that process fuels displacement conflict.

SIA

Social Impact Assessment: a public study of who loses land and livelihood before acquisition proceeds.

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