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Q8(b)

Do you think that forced displacement of labourers has caused their deprivation and resultant inequalities during the recent past years? Elaborate

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Challenges of Social Transformation

Challenges of Social Transformation: Crisis of development: displacement, environmental problems and sustainability; Poverty, deprivation and inequalities; Violence against women; Caste conflicts; Ethnic conflicts, communalism, religious revivalism; Illiteracy and disparities in education.

Core demand of the question

- Link forced displacement to labour deprivation and inequality
- Give dams, mining, cities, conflict, COVID, climate
- Use **Cernea**, Fernandes, Baviskar, legal R&R
- **Recent past years:** not only 1950s dams

Revision summary

Forced displacement strips land, commons and urban foothold, then cheapens labour.

Cernea's impoverishment risks and Fernandes's undercounting still describe Indian projects.

Recent drivers include mining, highways, city beautification, conflict, climate and COVID reverse migration.

Women, ST, SC and migrants lose most; land-value winners gain.

R&R law exists; deprivation remains the modal outcome when consent and livelihoods are thin.

Introduction

Forced displacement is not a moving truck. It is the **loss of land, commons, shop and papers**, after which people must sell labour on worse terms. In the recent past-urban clearance, mining, highways, conflict and COVID lockdowns-this has **deepened inequality** rather than sharing development's surplus.

Body

Mechanisms

Michael Cernea's impoverishment risks (landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, food insecurity, morbidity, social disarticulation) still fit Indian projects. **Walter Fernandes** documented undercounting of the displaced, especially Adivasis. **Amita Baviskar** showed how a dam or a city park can be an elite environmental good built on someone else's eviction. Special economic zones and coastal tourism add a post-liberalisation chapter that the old Narmada literature already predicted: public purpose becomes private accumulation.

When a household is moved, **cultivating rights** become a contractor's gang (**Breman**). Women lose forest and field income first. Children lose school continuity. Compensation, if paid, is often captured by men and brokers. **RFCTLARR 2013** and Forest Rights consent are the legal counter; implementation lags, and many urban evictions use municipal law instead. Cash compensation without land-for-land is itself a class device: it looks fair and spends quickly.

Recent past

Mining and industrial corridors in Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh; **smart city** and riverside "beautification" evictions; highway and railway widening; **Kashmir and North-East** conflict displacement; climate floods and erosion in Assam and the Sundarbans; and **COVID-19**, which forced migrant labour to walk home-a displacement from the city without a project plaque. Each episode transfers security from labour to capital or to a cleaner skyline. SEZ and coastal regulation fights show the same class map with a blue-economy vocabulary.

Inequality rises because the already asset-poor (ST, SC, Muslims in some city clearances, women-headed households) lose the only capital they had-location and networks-while receivers of the project gain land value. Labour deprivation is the **next scene**: once disembedded, people accept lower wages, longer hours, and no union. That is why displacement is a stratification event, not a logistics event. Recent years did not invent this pattern of dispossession; they sped it up through industrial corridors, expanding cities and a pandemic that treated migrant labour as disposable mobility.

Flow diagram

Forced displacement -> Asset loss
 Asset loss -> Worse labour terms
 Worse labour terms -> Inequality
 RFCTLARR FRA -> weak Forced displacement

Conclusion

- **Yes:** forced displacement in recent years has deprived labour of assets and bargaining power and has widened inequality. Law names rehabilitation; the social outcome is often a new informal proletariat.

Facts & figures

Cernea

Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction model: displacement as a predictable cluster of losses.

RFCTLARR 2013

Requires consent in some cases, SIA and R&R; urban and linear projects often slip the spirit of the Act.

COVID migrant crisis

A non-project forced movement that revealed labour's lack of the right to stay.

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