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## DEVELOPMENT-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT, WOMEN, AND SOCIAL SECURITY

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### ABSTRACT

*Development-induced displacement and resettlement is a complex process that disrupts the social, economic, and cultural lives of affected communities. Women, in particular, are disproportionately impacted due to their central roles in household management, community engagement, and cultural preservation. Understanding how resettlement affects women's social security is critical for designing equitable and effective resettlement policies. This study aims to examine the social and economic impacts of development-induced resettlement on women's social security, focusing on how displacement alters access to livelihoods, social networks, cultural roles, and overall well-being. The study adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary data. Scholarly journal articles published in refereed academic journals were reviewed, and qualitative content analysis was used to systematically interpret the literature. Michael Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) Model was applied as an analytical framework to assess the socio-economic risks women face during and after resettlement. Findings indicate that development-induced resettlement significantly affects women's social security across multiple dimensions. Socially, resettlement disrupts traditional networks, weakens community bonds, and reduces women's participation in cultural and social activities. Economically, women face landlessness, joblessness, reduced access to resources, and increased workloads, particularly when male household members migrate for employment. These impacts exacerbate psychological stress, health vulnerabilities, and food insecurity. The study highlights that women's social security is closely tied to household and community stability, and disruptions in women's roles have cascading effects on families and communities. Cernea's IRR Model effectively captures these*

*multidimensional risks, illustrating how each risk uniquely impacts women during resettlement. Development-induced resettlement poses multidimensional challenges to women's social security. To mitigate these impacts, resettlement planning must incorporate gender-sensitive policies, transparent communication, and active involvement of women at all stages. Ensuring women's access to resources, decision-making, and compensation is essential for safeguarding their social security, supporting family well-being, and promoting sustainable community development.*

**Keywords:** Development-Induced Displacement, Resettlement, Women's Social Security, Impoverishment Risks, Gender-Sensitive Policies

## Introduction

Displacement largely disrupts and breaks down social life and social relationships, and it is also a factor that, to varying degrees, affects every aspect of people's lives (Sorenson, 1998). Therefore, policymakers and researchers identify three long-term solutions that can conclude the process of displacement: return to the place of origin/voluntary repatriation, relocation, and local integration (Brun, 2003). Accordingly, when a population is displaced, they must be restored to their previous condition, also known as reconstruction and resettlement can be identified as one of the main strategies implemented for this purpose. When looking at global patterns of displacement and resettlement, it becomes apparent that they occur as a result of three main causes: resettlement due to natural disasters, development projects, and armed conflict (Cernea and McDowell, 2000). In Sri Lanka, three events in particular have drawn special attention in discussions about current displacement and resettlement: the tsunami of December 2004, large-scale infrastructure projects implemented over the past three decades, and the war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE (K. Fernando & P. Fernando, 2010).

Resettlement due to natural disasters refers to the process of relocating populations displaced by disasters such as tsunamis, floods, earthquakes, cyclones, landslides, and volcanic eruptions. In such cases, the displaced population must be resettled in safer areas. Additionally, during the implementation of various development projects, large areas of inhabited land are often acquired, resulting in the displacement of the population in those areas. According to World Bank reports, over the past twenty years, more than 250 million people worldwide have been displaced due to various development projects. In India, about 20 million people were displaced due to development projects between 1950 and 1980, while in China between 1950 and 2000, about 40–45 million people were displaced as a result of large-scale development projects (Stanley, 2004). Consequently, the resettlement of people displaced by development projects has led to a series of related social, economic, political, and cultural transformations.

Another form of resettlement observed globally is that which occurs as a result of armed conflict. Armed conflict forces populations in affected areas to leave, turning them into displaced persons. These people then need to be resettled in safer areas. According to World Bank reports, by the end of 2000, approximately 24.5 million people in 52 countries had been displaced due to armed conflict (Stanley, 2004). Various studies indicate that resettling displaced people back into their original villages after the end of armed conflict is often one of the most effective solutions (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006). However, such resettlement is not always a straightforward process it tends to be complex. This is due to the interconnected nature of resettlement with factors such as the redevelopment of original villages, re-establishment of communities, social reintegration, and reconciliation.

Robert Muggah (1998) defines resettlement as the planned and regulated movement of individuals from one location to another. Sorensen (1996) points out that resettlement cannot be understood merely as a simple return to normalcy after an abnormal situation or as simply adapting to a new environment. Rather, it involves a reorganization of the fundamental structure of society, as well as a reshaping of identity that emerges from new social patterns and new cultural practices. Thus, resettlement is not just about moving people from one place to another; it is a more complex process that goes beyond that basic action. In every resettlement process, the expectation is to restore the displaced population to their previous condition in other words, to reconstruct. This involves re-establishing their livelihoods, addressing their exposure to harmful conditions, and implementing fair and participatory processes (K. Fernando & P. Fernando, 2010). Therefore, a resettlement process aims not only to ensure the well-being of the displaced community but also to ultimately integrate them as contributors to the country's development.

A closer look at resettlement reveals that numerous practical problems often arise in connection with it. Various studies (Jayasiri et al., 2018; Akesada, 2009; Bascom, 2005) show that displacement and resettlement lead communities to face different types of economic problems. Cernea (1997) discusses the risk of impoverishment associated with displacement, noting that displacement and resettlement can result in eight major risks: loss of land, loss of employment, loss of housing, marginalization, increased vulnerability to diseases, food insecurity, loss of access to common property resources, and social disarticulation. Research also shows that displacement and resettlement can adversely affect people's health. This happens because resettlement often forces people to move to areas with different environmental conditions, disrupting the environmental context they had been accustomed to for a long time, while also increasing insecurity (Manatunge & Abeysinghe, 2017; Kloos, 1990). Furthermore, studies indicate that displacement and resettlement have social impacts, affecting specific groups such as women, children, and the elderly in different ways (Samarakoon, 2018; Scudder, 2005;

Stanley, 2004; Manurathna, 2004). It is therefore clear that resettlement processes expose resettled communities to a range of social, economic, political, cultural, educational, and health-related challenges, and that these challenges vary among different social groups.

Accordingly, it can be seen that resettlement impacts different social groups in different ways. Factors such as age structure, ethnicity, class disparities, and gender roles can influence these effects. In the study Changes in the Traditional Role of Women in the Family and New Trends, conducted by Manuratne (2004) using a traditional village and a Mahaweli settlement as case studies, it is shown that resettlement in Mahaweli settlements brought about significant changes in women's roles. These changes included women having to perform dual responsibilities within the family, alterations in the traditional division of labor, the breakdown of neighborly relations, and the loss of their participation in community organizations. All of these were adverse effects resulting from resettlement. In this context, resettlement has a strong influence on women's social security. This is due to factors such as the need to adapt to a different environment, the insecurity of that environment, the breakdown of social networks, separation from relatives, and the loss of employment opportunities, all of which lead to changes or disruptions in women's social security.

Women's social security is shaped within the social system itself, and therefore, it plays a strong role in ensuring women's social existence. However, although the design of resettlement projects focuses on visible and tangible aspects, little attention is given to the various challenges and impacts on women's social security after resettlement. In many cases, policies focus more on activities associated with men such as agriculture, land, and business while giving less consideration to the situations affecting women. Since women bear a large share of family responsibilities, the impact of resettlement on their social security can have a powerful influence on the entire household. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of development-induced resettlement on women's social security.

## **Methodology**

This study on the impact of development-induced resettlement on women's social security is a qualitative study based on secondary data. Accordingly, for this research, scholarly journal articles published in refereed academic journals that examine the impact of development-induced resettlement on women's social security were used. A qualitative content analysis method was applied to systematically review and interpret the existing literature on the subject. The research particularly focused on how forced resettlement due to development projects affects women's access to social networks, economic stability, and community roles.

For the analytical framework, Michael Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) Model was used, which discusses the risk of impoverishment associated with resettlement. This model was applied to assess how each risk uniquely influences women's social security during and after the resettlement process.

### **Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction Model (IRR Model)**

Michael Cernea recognized as a leading researcher in resettlement processes, identifies a principal model for understanding resettlement, the Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) Model. In this model, he highlights that communities face significant risks during displacement and resettlement. His framework serves both to predict and analyze these risks.

Cernea builds the impoverishment risk concept around three key elements:

1. Risks
2. Impoverishment
3. Reconstruction

Through the IRR Model, Cernea emphasizes the socio-economic risks that arise when people are resettled in new locations. According to this model, displacement exposes communities to eight major socio-economic risks:

1. Landlessness
2. Joblessness
3. Homelessness
4. Marginalization
5. Food insecurity
6. Morbidity
7. Loss of access to common property assets
8. Social disarticulation (Cernea, 2002).

### **Impact of Resettlement on Women's Social Security**

In the modern era, development has emerged as one of the most widely discussed topics. As defined by Wimal Dissanayake, development is the intelligent utilization of both a nation's natural and mental resources to improve the living conditions of its people. Accordingly, development can be understood as a qualitative transformation occurring across all sectors, or as qualitative changes within the economic and social systems. This transformation not only occurs in economic, social, cultural, educational, and health sectors, but also in areas such as individual attitudes and mindsets. In other words, people's thinking patterns and the way they process ideas must also be elevated to higher

levels. For example, even if a country has a high per capita income and literacy rate, if its suicide rate and the proportion of mental illness cases are high, that country is not considered to have achieved true development (Handaragama & Rasnayake, 2011).

The primary aim of development processes is to enhance people's livelihoods in order to raise their living standards. Introducing new livelihood strategies to face the challenges of a growing population is a national necessity. This often requires the provision of essential infrastructure for agriculture and industry. For this purpose, various large-scale multipurpose development projects are implemented, which in turn give rise to development-induced displacement and resettlement. Frequently, resettlement affects communities in multiple ways, primarily due to the change in the environment they have lived in for a long period and the need to adapt to a completely new environment. Accordingly, this section discusses, through secondary sources, how development-induced resettlement affects women's social security, focusing on both social and economic aspects.

## **Social Impacts**

Displacement and resettlement are complex processes, and one of its primary areas of impact is the social sphere. Resettlement often leads to the breakdown of social structures that are central to women's well-being and security. A major effect in this regard is the disruption or loss of social relationship networks and support systems. Women's social security largely stems from the social environment in which they are embedded, and changes to this environment can undermine their sense of security. Moving away from a familiar physical and social setting that they have been accustomed to for years can significantly affect their social stability. Traditionally, social networks and support systems provide women with emotional support, assistance in child-rearing, and community roles that strengthen their position in society. However, resettlement disrupts these systems, and rebuilding them in a new social environment can take considerable time (Yong, 2019; Wistbacka, 2018).

Athukorala (2013) points out that resettlement can lead to indebtedness and dependency, the emergence of anti-government attitudes, increased suicide rates, land disputes and related conflicts all of which are directly linked to women's social security. Moreover, women may face social isolation after resettlement, the breakdown of traditional agricultural patterns, and intergenerational problems that can further threaten their social security (Manurathna, 2004).

Chau Kwai-cheong (1995) showed that resettlement led to increased unemployment, health issues, and social dissatisfaction. The project displaced 8.2 million people, resulting in separation from social institutions and the breakdown of community

relationships. This, in turn, created strong resistance to the resettlement process, with many people suffering from both unemployment and deep social discontent. Women also experience psychological stress due to fears about new settlement areas, the loss of attachment to their former homes, changes in religious practices, and the loss of inherited property (Verma, 2004). Consequently, resettlement affects women's health as well causing sanitation problems, nutritional issues, changes in traditional responsibilities, and an increase in women's poverty levels (Rout, 2004). Being relocated to areas with different environmental conditions forces them to adjust after having been accustomed to a familiar environment for years, and the insecurity that accompanies resettlement exacerbates these challenges.

Many rural communities undergoing resettlement have deep emotional and cultural ties to their land. Losing this land often equates to losing traditions, customs, and identity. Women who preserved traditional knowledge such as rituals, customs, and indigenous medicine are often unable to continue fulfilling these roles, contributing to cultural erosion. Traditional farming, healing practices, and ways of living have either disappeared, weakened, or become rare. This is due to the need to establish a new social structure and organization in the new environment, where many cultural aspects change.

In particular, traditional gender roles have shifted, and women's roles in agriculture and community life have been altered, requiring adaptation to new social settings. Research also indicates that after people disperse into new settlements, social events, cultural celebrations, and community cooperation diminish. Women play a special role in preserving culture, but with the significant changes in social connections in resettlement areas, cultural celebrations and communal participation have declined, weakening cultural identities tied to land and local traditions. In this way, women must also face cultural impacts as a result of resettlement (Wistbacka, 2018; Yong, 2003).

### **Economic Impacts**

Another major impact that resettlements have on communities is economic. Various studies have shown that resettlement has a significant effect on the economy of the resettled community. These studies indicate that resettlement strongly affects individuals' livelihoods. This situation arises because livelihoods that were carried out in the original areas cannot be replicated in the new locations. This situation can also be observed particularly among women. Issues related to compensation payments for those who have lost land, and problems with the policies surrounding these payments, have also impacted women (Akesada, 2009). Accordingly, loss of land and livelihoods can be identified as one of the main problems resulting from resettlement. The underlying reason is that women are often engaged in informal sector activities, such as farming and forest resource collection, and when they are relocated to a new environment, these

opportunities are lost. As a result, women lose access to certain resources, making it difficult to sustain household livelihoods (Yong, 2019).

Resettlement affects both women and men in relation to agriculture, which is their main source of food and income. Additionally, they lose access to the traditional agricultural lands they previously held. Since both men and women work in agricultural lands, the resettlement process changes women's work responsibilities in agriculture. Furthermore, many women previously relied on forests for food, medicine, and child-rearing resources, which meant they had a close relationship with the forest. However, after resettlement, all of these activities became very difficult. This situation is a consequence of changes in the social and natural environment in which they originally lived. Limited space in the new settlement environment is one of the reasons these activities cannot be carried out. Consequently, this situation has affected women's domestic responsibilities. Moreover, compensation payments provided during resettlement have been perceived as unfair by the resettled community, as studies indicate that such payments were often given only to those with official land ownership (Wistbacka, 2018; Yong, 2003).

These studies also show that compensation payments have been disadvantageous to women. In some cases, after resettlement, men often had to migrate to distant areas for other employment, leaving women responsible for all household duties. This has meant that women had to manage both income generation and domestic work. Additionally, after resettlement, communities had to shift to a cash economy without sufficient preparation (e.g., buying all food instead of growing it), which has been challenging for them and has impacted women to some extent. Furthermore, limited employment opportunities in the new resettlement area often forced men to leave for work elsewhere, making it difficult for women to maintain their households and increasing their workload. This situation has also had an impact on women's social security. Since women often do not have formal land ownership, they face disadvantages when claiming compensation (Wistbacka, 2018; Yong, 2003).

In resettlement programs linked to development projects, the greatest impact is often felt by poor rural populations (Mathur, 1995). Forced resettlement due to development projects frequently disrupts the economic stability of many people, affecting them both positively and negatively. Studies on such development-related resettlements show that individual production systems are disrupted by resettlement. However, in some cases, development-related resettlement creates new job opportunities and markets, contributing to economic growth in the community. This effect also impacts women to varying degrees (Samarakoon, 2018).

Other challenges faced by women during resettlement include limited access to resources, economic instability, and patriarchal pressures. Studies show that resettlement

provides opportunities for women to redefine gender roles, participate more in community decision-making, and gain economic empowerment. Research also indicates that resettlement affects women's access to resources, livelihoods, and social positions, influencing their overall well-being and empowerment. Many women struggle to regain pre-conflict livelihoods due to the destruction of infrastructure, loss of land, and limited access to credit and markets. Families headed by women face particular economic difficulties due to limited resources and support networks. After resettlement, women also face challenges in securing land and property rights, often due to patriarchal norms and lack of formal documentation. In addition, women face social and psychological challenges stemming from changes in gender relations, limited access to services and infrastructure, and social stress. These circumstances highlight the need for gender-sensitive policies and interventions that improve access to economic resources, legal protection, and psychosocial support (Silva, 2020).

According to Cernea's IRR Model, studies show that the risks identified in the model are experienced by women due to development-induced displacement and resettlement, and that these risks also affect their social security. The way these risks impact women can be presented as follows:

### 1. Landlessness

- Women have lost access to land and farmland that were essential for their livelihoods.
- Since land ownership is often registered in men's names, women did not have the legal right to claim compensation for the lost land.
- In some cases, compensation was provided as cash to male heads of households, and women had no say in how it was spent.
- Loss of access to kitchen gardens and small plots reduced women's ability to grow vegetables or herbs for household use.
- Disputes over land allocation in new settlements sometimes excluded widows, single women, or women-headed households entirely.

### 2. Joblessness

- After resettlement, women have faced difficulties in finding employment.
- Men often migrated to other areas for work, leaving women to manage dual workloads—unpaid and burdensome household labor as well as farming or other tasks.
- Skills women possessed in their original locations (e.g., weaving, pottery, small-scale trading) often became irrelevant in the new settlements due to lack of markets.

- Limited mobility in unfamiliar surroundings and safety concerns restricted women's ability to seek wage work.
- Loss of informal work opportunities—such as selling surplus produce or prepared foods—reduced women's income-earning capacity.

### 3. Homelessness

- Although new housing was provided, women did not feel the same attachment to these houses as they did to their old homes.
- New housing often did not adequately meet traditional needs, for example, in the case of large family groups.
- The layout of resettlement housing sometimes disrupted privacy norms, affecting women's sense of dignity and security.
- Kitchens, water points, and storage spaces were often poorly designed, increasing the daily workload for women.
- Relocation sites were sometimes far from places of worship or culturally significant sites, impacting women's spiritual and social life.

### 4. Marginalization

- Women's social roles were overlooked, leading to a reduction in their social participation in the new settlement areas.
- The lack of land or employment reduced their economic and social status in the new communities.
- The breakdown of social networks caused psychological impacts.
- Decision-making bodies in resettlement areas often excluded women, meaning their needs were not represented in community planning.
- Cultural differences between resettled and host communities sometimes led to discrimination or exclusion of women from local groups.

### 5. Food Insecurity

- Before displacement, women ensured food security through farming, fishing, and gathering.
- After resettlement, the loss of farmland and resources made it difficult for women to provide food, increasing household hardships.
- Increased dependency on purchased food strained household budgets and reduced dietary diversity.
- The loss of access to traditional seeds and crops reduced women's ability to maintain culturally important food practices.

- In some cases, resettlement areas had lower soil fertility or insufficient irrigation, reducing agricultural yields for women farmers.

## 6. Morbidity

- After resettlement, women's health conditions faced new challenges, caused by limited access to clean water, poor sanitation, and restricted access to health services.
- Adapting to a new environment and the loss of existing social networks also increased mental stress and depression among women.
- Increased workloads (e.g., fetching water from farther distances) led to physical exhaustion and back injuries.
- Limited maternal and reproductive health services in new settlements increased risks for pregnant women.
- Exposure to new diseases in unfamiliar ecological settings caused higher vulnerability among women and children.

## 7. Loss of Access to Common Property Assets

- In their original areas, women had access to forests, rivers, and common lands to collect firewood, food, and medicine, but these were lost in the new settlements.
- This situation affected not only daily survival but also cultural practices tied to nature.
- Loss of free access to water sources meant women had to spend money to buy water or fuel, increasing household expenses.
- Lack of forest access limited women's ability to produce traditional handicrafts or herbal medicines, reducing both income and cultural continuity.
- Dependence on purchased energy sources (e.g., gas or electricity) created new economic pressures.

## 8. Social Disarticulation

- Resettlement disrupted traditional social networks that women relied on for mutual support (such as childcare, food sharing, and festivals).
- Strong community bonds among women were broken, increasing feelings of isolation and vulnerability.
- The loss of intergenerational living arrangements reduced informal childcare support for working women.

- New communities often lacked safe spaces for women to gather, reducing social interaction.
- Displacement sometimes created tensions with host communities, further isolating resettled women.

## Conclusion

This secondary study examined the social security impacts on women due to development-induced resettlements. It identified that resettlement due to development-induced displacement has significant social and economic impacts on women. These impacts include loss of access to land and farmland essential for livelihoods, loss of legal entitlement to compensation due to land being registered in men's names, difficulty in finding employment after resettlement, increased dual workloads for women when men migrate for employment, lack of attachment to new housing despite new accommodations being provided, inadequate fulfillment of traditional housing needs, underrepresentation of women's social roles in resettlement programs, lowered economic and social status in new areas due to lack of land or employment, disruption of social networks leading to psychological effects, difficulty in securing food and medicine due to lost forests and communal resources, limited access to clean water, health services, and sanitation, and increased mental stress due to lost social connections in new environments. Additionally, traditional social support networks were impacted, affecting mutual aid among women.

These findings make it clear that, as previous studies indicate, resettlement has multi-dimensional effects on women's social security. Therefore, greater attention must be given to women's social security in resettlement planning. Since women perform a significant portion of household labor, the impacts on women's social security strongly affect the entire family and, by extension, the broader society. Hence, at every stage of resettlement, from planning to implementation, women should be actively involved. Information about relocation, compensation, and risks should be communicated transparently and shared equitably with women. Communication channels should ensure women's access to and understanding of resettlement plans. Gender-sensitive policies should be implemented during resettlement, and women's needs must be prioritized in all programs and plans to ensure their social security throughout the resettlement process.

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