

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Purna Singh Bindra
Project Title	The Aftermath: Human Implications of Conservation Related Relocations and the Institutions that Shape Them
Application ID	36485-1
Date of this Report	30/05/2023

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

At the time of writing my grant proposal, I had two questions that were modified over the course of field work, for reasons given below:

1. **Understanding the longitudinal impact of the relocation on communities was one of the research questions for my doctoral project.** The original intention was to study the socioeconomic status of Botezari 15 years after its displacement from Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, (henceforth Tadoba) in 2007, basing the analysis on data from a PhD project in Botezari in 2007-8. This objective was modified for two reasons:
 - The original baseline data on the socioeconomic status at the time when Botezari (now Bhagwanpur) was relocated in 2007 was not made available.
 - Over the course of field work, our preliminary findings suggested that factors including government aid and support made available (or lack thereof) and the agency of the villagers have an immense bearing on shaping outcomes for the relocated people.

Therefore, my research now focuses on:

The socio-economic impacts on relocated people in the villages of Botezari (now Bhagwanpur) and Palasgaon, relocated in 2019. I also consider how the move affected the cultures, traditions and community dynamics. Looking at two villages located over a time period helped in gaining insights on how the relocation process, policies and governance have evolved.

2. **The 2nd original question (as put in the Rufford proposal) was to “understand the institutional mechanisms provided to the relocated people and its influence on the relocation process and outcome.”** As I grappled with the question, studied government documents, conducted interviews, held discussions with both affected people and implementing authorities, it became apparent that the governance of the relocation process could greatly impact relocation outcomes. A literature review also indicated that this is an acutely understudied aspect of conservation related relocation, especially in the Indian context.

Hence, I modified my research question to **examine the policy and its practice, i.e., the governance of relocation and its potential influence on post relocation outcomes based on a case study of Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.** Further, I work on the hypothesis that challenges faced by the project authorities in (the forest department) implementing policies on the ground has a bearing on relocation experience and outcomes.

I am also working on a step-by-step documentation of the relocation process basing it on evidence from archival material, official documents and correspondence, and a case study of the Palasgaon relocation.

My learning from the relocations from Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary and interviews with concerned authorities, NGOs, NGOs and relocated people from other sites will help provide a wider context to this issue.

- Earlier, **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala was the 2nd site marked to study for conservation related relocations, but this changed due to certain compulsions.** I started the first phase of my fieldwork in Tadoba in September 2021. Unfortunately, there were disruptions and delays due to COVID and I suffered personal health issues. Besides, data from Tadoba was throwing interesting insights and it was felt that a single-site study would provide richer and more nuanced information. Wayanad was, therefore, treated as a satellite site. I built on my earlier master's research and conducted a focused qualitative study to understand the wider context and how the local political economy and the agency of the relocated people may influence the outcomes for relocated family. I also delve on how social dynamics have changed within the community post relocation.

Note: I applied for the funding from The Rufford Foundation for supporting data collection for my doctoral research. While this has been achieved, I am working on collating and analysing the data before writing my thesis and academic papers. Hence, I have opted for the 'partially achieved' option below.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Understanding the impact of conservation-related relocation from Protected Areas on the affected communities				I did extensive field work in the project sites, spending over 175, 80 and 50 hours in Bhagwanpur, Palasgaon and Wayanad respectively. I used ethnographic methods (surveys, interviews, informal discussions, focus group discussions) to collect data on socioeconomic status, and access to state support and facilities. I recorded oral histories to document people's experiences and perceptions pre- and post-relocation. I have collected documentation and archival information to support my findings.
-Documenting the relocation process				I accessed government/official documents and correspondence to

<p>through a case study.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Understanding how relocation policies and its practise shape post relocation experiences. -Studying the constraints and challenges faced by the relocation authorities and their potential influence on relocation outcomes. 		<p>examine the relocation process, policies and guidelines concerning the relocation of Bhagwanpur (in 2007), Palasgaon (2019) and Wayanad (2013-14).</p> <p>I collected robust archival data on government compensation for the entire relocation process.</p> <p>I conducted extensive interviews with the key relocation authority (Forest Department; over 110 meetings²) and other concerned government institutions (Collectorate, Revenue Department and Zilla Parishad ¹ ; over 20 meetings²) and observed meetings between affected communities and relocation authorities.</p> <p>Interviews were also conducted of concerned NGOs, NGIs, researchers and media.</p> <p>I visited other ongoing relocations in TATR – Kolsa and Rantalodhi villages to observe first-hand the relocation dynamics.</p> <p>I am currently transcribing, coding, and analysing this information to identify shortcomings in the process and challenges faced during implementation potentially leading to negative outcomes. The attempt is also to arrive at best practices that may improve outcomes for the relocated.</p>
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¹ The Collectorate refers to the cluster of departments under the jurisdiction of the Collector, such as the revenue, public works, electricity, water supply departments etc. The Collector is the head of district administration, a coordinating officer among various departments and a connecting link between the public and the government as he executes the policies, administers the rules and regulations framed by the government. The collector also heads the District Relocation Committee, which is the nodal committee for the relocation process in rebuilding the village.

For the purpose of relocation, the revenue department is involved with beneficiary verification, land allotment, issuing and verifying varied government documents.

The Zilla Parishad is the district council and oversees village developmental works such as minor irrigation works, schools, village industries, sanitation, public health etc. through the Gram Panchayat.

² The meetings do not include other forms of communication including telephonic and email conversations with the various departments.

			My findings will also be informed by insights from conversations with key informants involved with relocations from Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary and other PAs around India.
Dissemination of research findings	of		<p>My work has been presented in several conferences (St. John's College, Cambridge University (2021, 2022); Royal Geographic Society Post Graduate Mid Term Conference, London [2021, 2023], British Ecological Society Annual Meet, and the PhD third year seminar at Department of Geography, University of Cambridge).</p> <p>Preliminary findings were shared via presentation and in an interactive session with Forest Department and Zilla Parishad officials in August 2022. I co-authored with my research assistant a commentary in <u>Mongabay</u>, critiquing a <u>previous article</u> written on the relocation from Bhagwanpur, Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR).</p> <p>I plan to continue presenting my findings at conferences and publishing findings as I progress with my analysis (both as academic papers and articles in mainstream media). I have been posting stories from the field and my research on social media (mainly Twitter and LinkedIn).</p>

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

I believe that my research findings, its dissemination and engaging with policy makers (described below) are important achievements of this project.

a). Research findings: Though my data collation and analysis are still ongoing, initial findings show that relocation policy and its practice impact outcomes. My study decodes the conservation related relocation process: the evolution of policies overtime, governance of relocation, the challenges and constraints faced by the relocation authorities, the socio-economic, cultural impacts on the displaced and factors that affect the relocation experience. My research builds on exiting

knowledge, filling vital gaps to gain a better understanding of displacement impacts, and factors that influence these outcomes.

I believe such scholarship can be a catalyst in creating a more empathetic and just relocation process. This is significant as there are ~496 villages in tiger reserves that are likely to be prioritised for relocation. Empathetic, fair, informed and incentivised relocations are important both from an ethical perspective, as well as to achieve long term conservation goals.

My review of current literature showed that the reduction in anthropogenic pressure post-relocation of villages supported the recovery of wildlife. We observed this anecdotally through conversations with forest department officers and photographic evidence collected during field work in Tadoba. I am engaged with authorities for further research in this for relocated sites.

In Wayanad, I found that intense human-elephant conflict, or the risks inherent in living in close proximity with elephants greatly restricted the choices and freedoms of people and was an important factor in the decision to relocate.

b). Dissemination of findings: My findings will be published in my PhD thesis. I expect to publish papers and short communications in peer reviewed scientific journals and environment news portals. I have been presenting my research including preliminary findings at conferences, and to the concerned project authorities, which have been well received. I will continue to pursue these avenues, while also sharing insights from field research on social media. I plan to write articles based on my research in mainstream media.

c). Bridging the science-policy-practice divide is important for evidence-based policy making. Coming from both communications and policy background, I have always laid stress on communicating scientific evidence and engaging with policy makers, as it is a crucial aspect of informing policy. It is an intrinsic part of this project as well, more so as displacement is an inherently traumatic exercise for the people with implications that last generations. It is also contentious, further highlighting the need for science-based communication.

After submission of the PhD thesis, I plan to communicate my findings through a potential report or a white paper. I hope to leverage my networks with implementing agencies and key decision makers to present the findings of the study as a policy recommendation so they may inform management of future relocations.

As mentioned earlier, I, along with my team, had presented initial findings to the relocation authorities and other concerned government agencies. I had made a few recommendations, which were received positively. For example, one of the recommendations was to consider the appointment of a social scientist to help monitor the progress of the relocated villages and facilitate better communication between communities and government authorities.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

Work in the field was hampered by massive COVID disruptions (lockdowns, peak periods etc.) where my team and I avoided fieldwork keeping in view the safety of the respondents. I also faced serious personal health setbacks. There was a situation of a medical emergency in the field, compelling me to take medical intermission for a period of 6 months from the University. To tackle this, I conducted my fieldwork in stages, and took breaks as necessary. It helped that fieldwork in the villages was well underway. However, as explained above, I took a decision, in consultation with my supervisor, to study Wayanad as a satellite site to understand the wider context of relocation governance and outcomes in different sites.

As timelines shifted during fieldwork, I got periods to reflect and assimilate the information we had collected. This helped in identifying some trends leading to new and important questions to ask, a key one being how the challenges faced in the governance of this complex, sensitive exercise influences post relocation outcomes.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

I employed people from the local community as field assistants and translators. I mostly stayed at homestays run by the local community when in Tadoba and Wayanad, used services of local guides, and locally run eateries, etc., for food.

As our studies identify lacunae in the relocation process and the best practices that shape relocation experience and outcomes, it is hoped that these will contribute to the redressal of persisting problems at the village level and inform future relocations.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

I will continue publishing and presenting my findings as I progress with my analysis, which will culminate in my PhD thesis.

I continue to engage with the relocation authorities. I am working on a plan to conduct a conference/interactive session on issues concerning relocation and human wildlife conflict (likely in September 2023). I expect the conference to have as participants relocation authorities, other concerned government departments, relevant NGOs/NGIs and the local media. This is subject to the availability of funding.

Research analysis and dissemination of findings will be the key to linking evidence to future governance and policy interventions, especially as there are ~496 villages that will be relocated over time.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

I regularly share my field experiences on social media, particularly Twitter and LinkedIn. I (along with my Research Assistant) am currently analysing data for potential

papers and expect to publish it in a journal of repute. I will continue to share my work in academic conferences as I progress with my research. As mentioned, I hope to write articles for mainstream media and share stories from fieldwork via social media.

Post the publication of my PhD thesis, I intend to present a white paper to concerned authorities giving a brief, targeted information toolkit and policy recommendations that could potentially inform future relocations.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

This project only sharpened my interest and involvement in policy and highlighted its fundamental role in addressing conservation issues including those surrounding human-wildlife dynamics in the Indian landscape.

I am also interested in engaging with issues surrounding human-wildlife conflict (HWC) and co-existence. Conserving biodiversity, especially megafauna like tigers, leopards, elephants in India, with a population of 1.4 billion, while ensuring the welfare of people, is a complex challenge. Scholarship supports that severe conflict can erode the tolerance of communities and be detrimental to conservation. My fieldwork, and my previous experience in other regions, has shown how co-existing with wildlife affects the everyday lives, decisions and freedoms of communities.

There exists a growing body of work on human-wildlife interactions and conflict mitigation, but given its severity and scale, certain aspects and geographies remain understudied. Examples include the Terai region where tigers live and breed in sugar fields, and elephants living in severely fragmented borderland (India-Nepal) habitats in North Bengal. Moreover, interventions at the ground level tend to be reactionary, and not science informed. I hope to engage in these issues and have identified a few areas of interest. I will probe these further future projects, though I can only undertake this post my PhD.

As mentioned in my proposal, I intend to continue to engage in policy relating to protected areas, conservation of wild habitats and issues of human-wildlife coexistence and conflict.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes, the logo has been used in presentations and The Rufford Foundation has been credited in the Mongabay article. The foundation handle has also been tagged in my tweets based on the study and from the field.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Name	Role	Comments
Krithika Sampath	Research assistant	Assisted with planning and executing field work, data

		collection and collation. Potentially co-authoring papers.
Samir Sheikh	Field guide, translator and assistant (from Mudholi village, Tadoba)	Helped familiarise me with the landscape, was key in building trust with the communities and data collection in Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve. He was our go-to person in any crisis and problems in the field! Potentially co-authoring papers.
Anil Tiwade	Field guide/ translator (from village Moharli, Tadoba)	Helped with data collection and translation in Bhagwanpur for 15 days.
Saket Agasti	Research volunteer and translator	Helped in the translation of official documents from Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, briefly.
Mukesh Shinde	Driver (from Bhagwanpur)	Helped with transportation in field site (Bhagwanpur)
Yogita Chhapekar	Research intern	Helped with data collection and translation in Bhagwanpur for a period of 2 months
Adarsh M A	Research volunteer	Helped with data collection and translation in Wayanad for 2 months
Radhika R	Research volunteer (relocated from Kurchiyad village in Wayanad)	Helped with data collection and translation in Wayanad for a month

10. Any other comments?

Initially, my PhD project was titled, *'The Aftermath: Human Implications of Conservation Related Relocations and the Institutions that Shape Them'*. As explained in the report, the focus of my research was modified based on field conditions and trends indicated during data collection.

Presently, my doctoral research is expected to provide a comprehensive analysis of conservation related relocation, unravelling the process from a people, policy and governance perspective. Accordingly, my working title for the PhD is *'Decoding conservation- related resettlement: Case studies from Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve India'*.

Do note that, since I am still processing the data collected in line with the research focus (and it has not been published), I am constrained to share findings as yet.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to The Rufford Foundation for the grant support towards my doctoral research. The foundation's generous assistance has been instrumental in enabling my research activities, including covering essential expenses like travel, accommodation, and research assistance. The grant not only opened doors to conduct extensive research with the relocated communities, implementing agencies and field experts, but also provided access to vital resources, significantly enhancing the quality and impact of my work. It brought together a team of remarkable people, who were supported through this research year, and it has been a learning experience for all of us. I believe it will serve to strengthen our efforts for conservation in the future. I am pleased to be part of the Rufford Foundation network, and grateful for its contribution in my academic journey.



Team member Krithika Sampath conducting survey at Botezari (Bhagwanpur) village.



Discussing the ongoing relocation with villages from Kolsa, TATR.



In the field, people who have relocated out from Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.



A meeting held at the Rantalodi village inside TATR on their upcoming relocation.



A meeting held at the Rantalodi village inside TATR on their upcoming relocation.



Presentation-Chandrapur Forest Academy, Maharashtra - August 2022.



Construction of new Rantalodhi , relocation ongoing - Tadoba.



Spotted deer in the Palasgaon meadow.



Tiger Cub nr Palasgaon.



Tigress in the Jamni Grasslands in Tadoba from where a village was relocated.



Tiger Cub near Jamni meadows -Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.