

IMPROVING RESETTLEMENT OUTCOMES FOR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY ON THE WORLD BANK FUNDED TAMIL NADU SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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SUMMARY

Location: Chennai, India

Project Name: Tamil Nadu Sustainable Urban Development Program

Funder: World Bank and the Government of Tamil Nadu

Total Project Cost (USD): 600 million USD

Loan Amount: 400 million USD

Problems: Lack of transparency, meaningful consultations and inadequate resettlement for 300+ families impacted by an infrastructure project financed by the World Bank and the Government of Tamil Nadu

Activities: Early interventions (using research, testimony, direct advocacy and traditional media) by vulnerable residents, victims of forced evictions and community-based organizations to improve terms of resettlement and compensation

Outcomes:

Securing compensation for victims of forced evictions

Preventing the evictions of 200+ families initially identified in project documents

Securing education assistance for children impacted by resettlement

Negotiating improvements in facilities and services at resettlement sites

Impact:

Increased public scrutiny and oversight of project activities

Improved resettlement outcomes for victims of forced evictions

Improved access to information and remedy for harms caused

Introduction

The World Bank in Chennai, India

In 2015, the World Bank signed a USD 400 million loan agreement with the Government of Tamil Nadu to finance the Tamil Nadu Sustainable Urban Development Program (TNSUDP), a project with the stated goal of investing and carrying out reforms in urban services, finance and governance. A sizeable portion of the funding was directed towards one component in particular - the construction of canals in select areas of the city of Chennai to improve the storm water drainage system. According to Bank documents, the project would necessitate the physical and economic displacement of 330 families living or working at the proposed project sites.

Since early 2015, the International Accountability Project (as part of the *Early Warning System* initiative) and a community-based advocacy group, the Information Resource Center for Deprived Urban Communities, have supported vulnerable residents in their campaign to safeguard and protect their rights to housing and livelihood. After the sudden forced evictions of one group of residents in February 2016, affected families successfully negotiated with the local government and the World Bank to secure access to adequate compensation, livelihood assistance, education and housing. As a result of residents' advocacy and opposition to the proposed resettlement plan, the project was re-designed and the number of families facing resettlement was revised down to 81.

This case study details the strategies used by residents and community-based groups to improve the transparency, terms and implementation of the planned resettlement and to seek remedy for those harmed. Notwithstanding the political situation in Chennai and the complex socio-political dynamics that underpin each intervention, we believe the strategies described here can be replicated in a variety of contexts and countries.

Background

A Troubling Track Record on Resettlement

Chennai, located on the southeast coast of India, is a densely populated city of 7 million people. According to a 2011 census, close to a third of residents live in informal settlements. In recent years, residents in "unauthorized" settlements have been subjected to forced evictions. According to [data](#) collected by the Transparent Cities Network, it is estimated that at least 150,000 people have been evicted as a result of so-called development projects in the past ten years alone. Research suggests evictions for development projects have mostly been coercive and at times, violent. Evictees are often compelled to relocate to resettlement colonies, consisting of heavily concentrated high-rise tenements, located far from the city center with limited opportunities to earn an income.

Despite the scale and scope of evictions, Chennai lacks a comprehensive policy addressing housing, rehabilitation and resettlement. This has not deterred World Bank and other international financiers from funding projects in the city. In fact, it has been argued that the present state of housing and resettlement practices for the urban poor in Chennai can be attributed in part to the interventions by the World Bank, going back to 1975. In more recent years, the Bank has also come under fire for its poor track record on resettlement. According to an [external investigation](#) published in 2015, projects financed by the Bank over a 10 year period physically or economically displaced at least 3.4 million people around the world. Facing mounting criticism from communities and civil society, the Bank promised to take steps to remedy the situation.

Despite acknowledging these failures, the Bank nonetheless continued to approve lending for high risk projects with severe resettlement impacts, including the Tamil Nadu Sustainable Urban Development Program (TNSUDP).

Communities Lead in the Fight for the Right to Housing and Livelihood

The World Bank uses the term “project affected families” to account for the people who will be directly subjected to the environmental and social impacts of its activities. Project affected families are not necessarily the intended beneficiaries of the promised development outcomes. According to a press release announcing TNSUDP, the intended beneficiaries of the project are the approximately 2 million people living in select urban municipalities in Tamil Nadu.

In its initial assessment, the World Bank identified 330 families as being potentially impacted by physical or economic displacement as a result of construction activities. About 80% of ‘project affected families’ belonged to marginalized communities (i.e. scheduled caste/scheduled tribes/other backward castes and classes), 3.9% included persons with disabilities, and 20% consisted of households headed by women. An overwhelming majority (97%) did not receive a regular income. Families were told they would be moved to two resettlement sites (Ezhil Nagar and Thirumazhisai) located far from the economic centers of the city. The proposed sites comprise large tenement structures that house thousands of people, many of whom had been evicted to make way for similar development projects.

Prior to the decision to approve the project, the World Bank’s engagement with affected families consisted of 9 focus group discussions held on 3 separate days in late 2014 and early 2015. Residents have since disputed the actual number of consultations held, stating that it was far fewer than what is claimed in official documents. On the nature of the consultations themselves, residents have noted that they were merely informed about project plans and their impending resettlement. Their comments and concerns were then recorded and subsequently published in a “Resettlement Action

Plan.” This process failed to properly account for the priorities of those being resettled – and did not provide opportunities for residents to propose alternatives or become involved in the decision-making process.

Two months before the decision to approve funding, the Information Resource Center for Deprived Urban Communities conducted outreach with residents to document concerns and record their recommendations on how the project should proceed. With the support of the International Accountability Project, this information was compiled and sent to the Board of Directors of the World Bank Group in the form of a “Citizen’s Response” urging the Bank to refrain from approving the project until the resettlement concerns had been adequately addressed. This was the first of many interventions that were spearheaded by affected residents to improve and monitor the design, implementation and outcome of resettlement.

Residents adopted a diverse set of approaches to negotiate with decision-makers, including officials working with different government agencies at the local, district and state level, and representatives of the World Bank Group in India. The success of their interventions is rooted in an evidence-based and community-led approach that can be broadly categorized into four key advocacy areas: 1) direct advocacy with decision-makers; 2) community-led research; 3) documenting testimony and rights violations; 4) media advocacy. Residents carefully debated their strategy to approach decision-makers and make their concerns heard. At times, meetings with officials were facilitated with the support of researchers and volunteers at the Information Resource Center for Deprived Urban Communities, but the decision to proceed was ultimately directed through a collective and consensus-based process.

Through early interventions, residents overcame a major structural barrier in development planning –

the top-down management and implementation of resettlement. Despite confronting violent forced evictions, affected communities mobilized to successfully negotiate for better access to compensation, services, education, livelihood rehabilitation and ultimately, housing.

Direct Advocacy with Decision-Makers

The two main decision-makers directing the funding and implementation of the project were the World Bank Group and the Corporation of Chennai. An additional agency, the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, was responsible for housing and public services in resettlement sites. The following list describes the various communications targeted at decision-makers and their subsequent impact on project activities:

- *Citizen's Response to TNSUDP* – On March 30, 2015 a formal letter detailing communities' concerns over resettlement was sent to the Board of Directors of the World Bank prior to a key decision date. Subsequently, the Treasury Department of the United States released a statement urging close monitoring of the project.
- *Meetings with World Bank India & local implementing agencies* – In 2015 and 2016, a series of meetings were organized between residents, members of World Bank India, the project monitoring team and local government bodies responsible for implementing the project. Unique to this project, various documents such as consent forms, resettlement terms and conditions and information disclosures were provided in writing on the insistence of communities. Additionally, facing strong opposition to project plans from one group of residents, the project was re-designed to exclude 231 families from being resettled as originally planned.
- *Petitions following forced evictions* – In February 2016, 43 families from one locality were forcibly evicted from their homes and relocated to a resettlement site with little advance warning. The World Bank has maintained the evictions were not

linked to its project despite listing the same families in resettlement documents the previous year. After many months of advocacy, including petitions, letters and reports on the adverse impacts experienced by communities (loss of education and livelihood, deteriorating standards of living, threats to personal safety of women and children), families have received the compensation and resettlement promised under this project.

- *Filing complaints to seek remedy* – 33 families who were forcibly evicted filed complaints and made use of the project grievance mechanism, a system through which residents can file their concerns or objections with local government authorities about the project. The complaints compelled the Bank and government to respond to concerns relating to inadequate compensation and poor standards of living at resettlement sites. The revised resettlement plan now reflects the demands of community members.

Community-based Research and Training:

Advocacy for this project was informed by evidence and findings gathered from primary research. Research efforts were organized locally by the Information Resource Center for Deprived Urban Communities, with the support of community-based organizations and volunteers. As a result of this research, important information about post-resettlement standard of living was tracked and monitored. Trainings were organized to strengthen the capacity of community members to assert their rights and access decision-makers. These efforts proved instrumental in changing outcomes, as listed here:

- *Survey of affected residents* – An initial survey found that 56 families had been excluded from the original resettlement and compensation plans. They were subsequently added to the list.
- *Social Impact Assessment* - In the immediate aftermath of forced evictions, a social impact

assessment (loosely modelled after the one utilized by the World Bank) revealed the devastating impacts on access to education, safety and livelihood. Local authorities responded promptly to the findings of the report and made promises to resolve the issues raised.

- Rights training - 120 women, 54 men, 24 young people and 34 children participated in a housing rights training program. 82 women, 38 men and 15 young people participated in a right to information training. Residents involved in the trainings used their knowledge to successfully prevent evictions in their community.

Testimony and Documenting Human Rights Violations:

Community members and local organizations extensively recorded and documented interactions with the government and World Bank officials. Residents used their smartphones to record photos and videos of meetings or capture images of documents they were asked to sign. During the forced evictions, local organizations and members of the media were present to document the evictions as they happened and interview residents. This trove of information proved useful during research and advocacy, to make the case for each community's priorities and concerns.

Testimony gathered immediately after the forced evictions formed the basis of individual petitions submitted to the project-level grievance mechanism. The testimonies provided a powerful rebuttal to claims that the evictions had been carried out for 'humanitarian reasons.' Individual testimonies are excerpted here:

"Our children's education has been affected. There are no schools nearby. We need to hire van service to send our children to school but the cost of hiring a van is almost the same as the tuition fee for the school. We cannot afford such an expenditure. Our children have not been going to school ever since we were moved here."

"They initially promised us free houses. But now they are charging a monthly rent of Rs. 750. We do not have an income here. If we fail to pay, they will disconnect electricity and water supply. We do not know what to do."

"There is no way for us to earn a livelihood here. It is difficult to even ensure basic food on a day to day basis. Our loans have increased. We have had to mortgage our belongings just to get by."

"My husband was the bread winner of this family, after relocation he lost his job. My child is 7 years old and was enrolled in kindergarten. She is too young to travel two hours to reach school. We do not know where the nearest school is to enroll her."

After a year of advocacy and campaigning, residents who had experienced forced evictions were able to secure additional compensation, financial assistance for their children's education, a reliable bus service, promises of job training programs and ultimately, the agreement to move to a resettlement site of their choosing.

Media Advocacy:

News articles on project activities raised awareness about the problems faced by vulnerable communities and prompted a response from both the government and World Bank officials. In the past 3 years, local newspapers have filed over a dozen stories documenting the problems around housing and resettlement for this particular project. Media reports corroborated the findings of the community-based research efforts, bolstering the credibility and urgency of community demands. The decision to engage local newspapers was a deliberate one, with the goal to advance transparency and accountability. A sample of the press coverage is listed here:

Project will require eviction of 455 families (2015, November 30) *Deccan Chronicle*
<http://bit.ly/2HBCogs>

JJ Nagar slum dwellers relocated far away from relocation site (2016, February 9) *Indian Express* <http://epaper.newindianexpress.com/c/8514788>

Life not easy for flood-hit residents in new area (2017, February 17) *The Hindu* <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/life-not-easy-for-floodhit-residents-in-new-area/article8246296.ece>

Lessons Learned:

As this case study demonstrates, local communities have been relatively successful in negotiating for better outcomes and improved transparency in project operations. Their actions and advocacy provide a valuable lesson for others organizing to protect their homes and livelihoods. Listed here are four key insights drawn from this campaign:

Early Interventions reduce harm – In many cases, information about resettlement becomes available far too late to influence a change. The window of opportunity to intervene can be narrow, given that resettlement plans are frequently drafted without community input. Through early interventions, communities have the opportunity to shape the resettlement process according to their own priorities.

Information flows both ways – Communities frequently face multiple barriers to obtaining timely and accessible information about resettlement. At the same time, many problems can be traced to information simply not being recorded. Information about post-resettlement outcomes or the condition of resettlement sites are completely absent in official documents. Communities themselves may have more information about these topics than what is publically available. Banks and governments should recognize and incorporate local knowledge and expertise when planning resettlement.

Community organizing builds power - Community-organizing is not just an effective campaign tool, it can

also collectively raise the capacity and ability of communities to confront shared challenges. To overcome structural barriers, vulnerable community members may organize as task teams, to work on different advocacy efforts. Community organizing is indispensable in building a sustained and effective advocacy campaign.

Conclusion

Decision-making in development continues to be a process that is removed from the lived experiences of people who are the most affected. Development should not impoverish some and enrich others. The strongest safeguard against harmful development is the leadership of local communities in shaping how development is planned and implemented. As this case study demonstrates, engaging local communities from the beginning of the development process can prevent harm and lead to improved outcomes.

ANNEX

Blogs

Anatomy of a Displacement (2015, April 1) *Medium*
<https://medium.com/@accountability/anatomy-of-a-displacement-79eebecf2a45>

It's not about ending poverty, it's about eradicating the poor (2015, June 9) *Medium*
<https://medium.com/@accountability/in-chennai-india-residents-demand-the-world-bank-respect-human-rights-43a4d121b8f2>

After Floods and False Promises, Dozens in Chennai, India Forcibly Evicted (2016, February 9) *Medium*
<https://medium.com/@accountability/after-floods-and-false-promises-dozens-identified-by-world-bank-funded-project-in-chennai-india-f48b5c41ab56>

Reports

Citizens' Response to TNSUDP (2015, March 31)
<http://bit.ly/2H3Br3u>

Report on Forced Evictions (2016, May)
<http://bit.ly/2vg5KYu>

Resettlement Impacts on Women and Children (2016, November) <http://bit.ly/2H4BfBb>

Press

Project will require eviction of 455 families (2015, November 30) *Deccan Chronicle*
<http://bit.ly/2HBCogs>

JJ Nagar slum dwellers relocated far away from relocation site (2016, February 9) *Indian Express*
<http://epaper.newindianexpress.com/c/8514788>

From flood-ravaged slum, families pushed to ghetto on Chennai's edge with no water, power or schools (2016, November 27) *The Indian Express*
<http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/2016/nov/27/from-flood-ravaged-slum-families-pushed-to-ghetto-on-chennais-edge-with-no-water-power-or-schools-1543047.html>

Life not easy for flood-hit residents in new area (2017, February 17) *The Hindu*
<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/life-not-easy-for-floodhit-residents-in-new-area/article8246296.ece>

As Nolambur 'squatters' move out, children to bear the brunt (2017, February 23) *The Times of India*
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/as-nolambur-squatters-move-out-children-to-bear-the-brunt/articleshow/57303474.cms>

Homes given to slum dwellers provide shelter not succor (2017, June) *The Times of India*
<http://bit.ly/2H83y1x>