

Displacement and Livelihood: Impact of Dam-Induced Displacement on Rural FamilyHarpal, Utkal¹ ; Tandi, Dr. Subal²DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19598720>**Review: 01/04/2026****Acceptance: 01/04/2026****Publication: 16/04/2026****Abstract**

Large dam projects, while contributing significantly to national development, have caused widespread displacement of rural families in India. These projects often lead to loss of land, livelihood, cultural dislocation, and social fragmentation. The proposed study, “*Displacement and Livelihood: Impact of Dam-Induced Displacement on Rural Family*,” aims to examine how dam-induced displacement affects the structure, livelihood, and intergenerational dynamics of rural families in India, with a specific focus on the socio-economic and emotional consequences of resettlement. This research intends to analyze how displacement reshapes the traditional joint family system, alters gender roles, and influences children’s education and elderly care. It will explore the coping strategies employed by displaced families, the role of state rehabilitation policies, and the persistence of livelihood insecurity even after resettlement. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study will employ both quantitative surveys and qualitative case studies in dam-affected regions of Odisha (for example, Hirakud and Indravati projects). Primary data will be collected through household surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with displaced families, community leaders, and government officials. The study’s significance lies in connecting family sociology with development-induced displacement literature. By analyzing the family as a social unit under stress, the research will provide a nuanced understanding of how development projects disrupt social cohesion, kinship relations, and gender balance in rural India. The expected outcomes include a comprehensive assessment of displacement’s multi-dimensional impacts, an evaluation of policy responses, and recommendations for inclusive rehabilitation frameworks. The findings will contribute to policy formulation by emphasizing the need for family-sensitive rehabilitation and livelihood restoration programs that preserve social and cultural continuity alongside economic compensation.

Keywords: Dam-induced displacement, Rural families, Livelihood transformation, Development projects, Resettlement and rehabilitation, Family structure.

A) Introduction

Development projects, particularly large dams, have been hailed as the symbols of modern progress and economic advancement in post-independence India. These projects aim to provide irrigation, electricity, flood control, and industrial growth. However, they have also generated one of the most complex and persistent social problems—displacement and resettlement. Dam-induced displacement affects millions of rural families across India, uprooting them from their ancestral lands, livelihoods, and cultural settings. According to various estimates, over

¹Lecturer in Sociology, Kalahandi GNM College of Nursing, Bhawanipatna, Odisha, India, Email Id- utkalaharpal619@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Maa Manikeswari University, Bhawanipatna, Odisha, India, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8518-6198, Gmail ID: subaltandi@gmail.com

60 million people in India have been displaced since 1947 due to development projects, of which nearly 40% are tribal and rural populations dependent on land and natural resources for survival (Tandi, 2026).

Displacement is not merely a physical relocation; it is a profound social and emotional rupture. It disrupts established patterns of social relations, kinship networks, economic practices, and traditional family structures. Rural families that were once self-sustaining through agriculture and forest resources often find themselves marginalized in unfamiliar environments. The Hirakud Dam in Odisha (1957) and the Indravati Project (1990s) are classic examples where thousands of families were displaced, many of whom are still struggling with insecure livelihoods and fragmented family systems decades later (Tandi, 2025).

The family, being the primary social unit, bears the brunt of this forced transformation. It is within the family that adaptation, resilience, and suffering are most acutely experienced. Men and women lose their land-based roles, children's education is disrupted, and elders face isolation and loss of community ties. The displacement process also often transforms gender roles—women, traditionally engaged in agriculture and domestic work, become key contributors to household income through informal labor. Thus, dam-induced displacement does not only result in economic impoverishment but also causes social disarticulation and cultural erosion (Tandi, 2025).

The proposed study, therefore, seeks to understand how dam-induced displacement impacts the structure, functioning, and livelihood patterns of rural families in Odisha. By focusing on both older and more recent displacement sites, this study aims to uncover the long-term and intergenerational consequences of forced resettlement on family systems and livelihoods.

B) Theoretical Framework

The study will be grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates sociological, anthropological, and development studies perspectives.

1. Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) Model (1997) Michael Cernea's IRR model is one of the most influential frameworks in displacement studies. It identifies eight major impoverishment risks faced by displaced populations: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity, loss of access to common property resources, and social disarticulation. This model provides a structured way to understand how displacement leads to multi-dimensional impoverishment. In the context of dam-induced displacement, this study will use the IRR model to examine how rural families experience these risks and what strategies they employ for reconstruction. It will particularly emphasize social disarticulation—the breakdown of family and community networks—and how it influences livelihood recovery.
2. Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) Family Systems Theory views the family as an interdependent emotional unit where changes in one part affect the entire system. Displacement introduces severe external stressors that test the family's adaptability and resilience. By applying this theory, the study will analyze how displacement alters intra-family relationships, gender dynamics, and intergenerational support systems. It will also examine coping strategies, emotional interdependence, and the ways families reorganize themselves to survive in new social and economic environments.

3. Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Chambers and Conway, 1992) This framework conceptualizes livelihood as the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. Displacement drastically alters livelihood assets—land, capital, labor, and social networks—forcing families to adopt new strategies. This approach helps in understanding how displaced families reconstruct livelihoods through wage labor, migration, small trade, or dependence on government schemes, and how these strategies vary across gender and age groups.

By combining these frameworks, the study situates displacement not just as an economic phenomenon but as a multi-layered social process that affects every dimension of family life—social, emotional, economic, and cultural.

C) Statement of the Problem

Despite extensive research on the economic and administrative dimensions of displacement, the family as a site of impact and resilience has received limited scholarly attention. Most studies have focused on macro-level rehabilitation policies or on the aggregate numbers of people displaced, neglecting the micro-level transformations within households and kinship structures.

The following problems are central to the proposed research:

1. Erosion of Family and Kinship Networks: Displacement often results in the scattering of extended families and communities. The relocation sites rarely accommodate entire villages together, leading to fragmentation of kin groups and weakening of traditional support systems.
2. Loss of Livelihood and Economic Insecurity: The transition from agrarian livelihoods to wage-based or informal labor markets results in unstable income, indebtedness, and poverty. Families that once depended on land and forests lose their production base and face difficulties adapting to non-agricultural occupations.
3. Transformation of Gender Roles and Family Responsibilities: The loss of traditional livelihoods compels women to enter the labor market, often in low-paid and insecure jobs. Men may migrate for work, leaving women to manage households alone, leading to changes in power relations within families.
4. Disruption of Education and Intergenerational Continuity: Children's education is often interrupted due to relocation, and the elderly lose their sense of belonging and authority. Family rituals, social norms, and intergenerational ties are severely affected.
5. Psychological and Emotional Stress: Displacement generates deep emotional trauma, including anxiety, depression, and loss of identity. The feeling of rootlessness affects family cohesion and mental health.
6. Inadequate Rehabilitation Policies: Most rehabilitation programs emphasize economic compensation but fail to address the social, emotional, and cultural dimensions of displacement. The result is partial recovery and persistent marginalization.

Therefore, the problem is not limited to physical relocation; it encompasses a holistic crisis of livelihood and social reproduction. Understanding how displacement affects the rural family system is essential for designing humane and sustainable rehabilitation policies.

D) Scope of the Study

The study will focus on dam-induced displacement in Odisha, a state that has witnessed both early and ongoing development projects with significant social implications. Two major sites are selected for empirical investigation:

1. Hirakud Dam (Sambalpur District): Constructed in the 1950s, it represents one of India's earliest and largest displacement experiences. Many families continue to face socio-economic marginalization decades after resettlement. Studying this site provides long-term insights into the intergenerational impacts of displacement.
2. Indravati Dam (Kalahandi District): Completed in the 1990s, it offers a relatively recent example of displacement. It allows comparison with older cases to understand how policy changes have affected rehabilitation outcomes over time.

The study will adopt a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a holistic understanding. Approximately 200 displaced households will be surveyed across both sites. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation will provide qualitative depth, capturing the lived experiences of families.

The analysis will focus on:

- Changes in family structure and composition (joint to nuclear, or dispersed kin units).
- Livelihood transitions, including diversification of income sources and migration patterns.
- Gender and intergenerational relations, particularly how roles and responsibilities are redistributed.
- Social and cultural continuity, including rituals, festivals, and community identity.

Geographically, the study will be confined to selected villages in Sambalpur and Kalahandi districts, but its findings will have wider applicability to other dam-affected areas in India. The temporal scope covers both immediate and long-term post-displacement phases, offering a comparative perspective across generations.

In summary, this study seeks to bridge the existing gap between macro-level policy analysis and micro-level family experiences. It will provide a nuanced understanding of how displacement transforms rural family life, not merely as a matter of economic loss but as a profound social reorganization. The findings will contribute to both academic discourse and policy formulation by emphasizing that rehabilitation must move beyond compensation toward livelihood restoration, social integration, and emotional well-being.

Critical Review of Key Research Works

Development-induced displacement has been a major area of sociological and anthropological concern in post-independence India. Large-scale projects such as dams, mining, and industrialization have uprooted millions of

rural and tribal families. Among these, dam-induced displacement remains the most significant, both in scale and socio-economic impact. This review critically examines the major theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of displacement, livelihood, and family transformation, highlighting the strengths and limitations of existing works.

One of the earliest comprehensive studies on displacement in India is by Walter Fernandes (1991, 2006), who estimated that nearly 50 million people were displaced due to development projects between 1951 and 2000, with less than one-third rehabilitated properly. Fernandes' works emphasize the inadequacy of compensation-based rehabilitation and the invisibility of social and cultural losses in development planning. He introduced the idea of development as displacement, arguing that state-led modernization often produces structural marginalization for vulnerable communities, especially tribal and agrarian families. However, Fernandes focused mainly on macro policy failures and did not extensively analyze the intra-family changes caused by displacement.

Parasuraman (1999), in his book *The Development Dilemma*, studied the Narmada Valley Project and offered a detailed account of livelihood dislocation and the failure of resettlement policies. He demonstrated that loss of agricultural land not only affects income but also social identity, gender relations, and intergenerational cohesion. Parasuraman's contribution lies in linking economic displacement with the erosion of social capital. Yet, his research, while rich in livelihood analysis, lacks a micro-level exploration of how family roles, emotional bonds, and kinship structures are altered through displacement.

Michael M. Cernea (1997) introduced the influential Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) Model, which provides a conceptual framework to understand the multiple risks faced by displaced populations — such as landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity, loss of access to common property, and social disarticulation. This model has been widely applied in studies across Asia and Africa. Cernea's framework highlights the social and cultural impoverishment that accompanies economic loss, emphasizing the need for reconstruction rather than mere compensation. However, later critiques (Downing, 2002; Mathur, 2013) argued that the IRR model does not sufficiently address gendered and psychological dimensions of displacement, which are crucial in understanding family-level impacts.

Scudder and Colson (1982, 2005) provided a longitudinal model of the resettlement process, identifying four stages: recruitment, transition, potential development, and incorporation. Their model is significant for understanding adaptation over time, yet it views the displaced primarily as homogeneous groups rather than as families with diverse experiences shaped by gender, age, and class. Studies following this approach often neglected intra-household variations and emotional consequences of forced relocation.

Baviskar (2004), in *In the Belly of the River*, examined the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the politics of environmental justice. Her ethnographic work illustrates how displacement disrupts the relationship between people, land, and water, reshaping identities and social belonging. Baviskar's contribution lies in situating displacement within the framework of environmental and cultural politics. Nevertheless, her analysis remains more community-oriented than family-centric, leaving gaps regarding the restructuring of household economies and gender roles within displaced families.

In the context of Odisha, Padel and Das (2010) analyzed the social and cultural effects of industrial and dam-induced displacement among tribal communities. They revealed how displacement not only leads to economic impoverishment but also erodes traditional kinship systems, ritual life, and ecological knowledge. The authors emphasized the concept of “cultural genocide,” arguing that displacement destroys indigenous modes of living. However, their work, while rich in cultural anthropology, does not provide detailed empirical insights into livelihood reconstruction or family resilience mechanisms.

Mathur (2013), in *Social Development and the State*, brought attention to the politics of rehabilitation and the gap between policy intentions and implementation. His critique of the bureaucratic approach to resettlement shows that most rehabilitation packages focus on individual compensation rather than collective or family-based restoration. This insight is particularly relevant to the present study, as it points to the neglect of the family as a social unit in policy design.

Gender dimensions of displacement have been explored by scholars like Mehta and Srinivasan (2000) and Kothari (1996), who argue that women experience displacement differently, often facing a double burden of economic insecurity and loss of social support. Displacement tends to increase women’s workload, reduce their access to land and resources, and marginalize them in decision-making processes related to compensation and relocation. These studies reveal that family disintegration often intensifies patriarchal control or, alternatively, forces women into new economic roles. However, there is limited empirical research connecting gender shifts to overall family reorganization.

Tribal displacement research in states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha (Singh, 2008; Mishra, 2014) has shown that traditional joint family systems often break down after relocation. Fragmentation of extended families into nuclear units leads to weakening of kinship bonds and community solidarity. These studies underscore that displacement is not only physical relocation but also social fragmentation. Yet, most of them provide descriptive rather than analytical accounts, lacking a theoretical linkage to family systems theory.

Recent interdisciplinary works (Terminski, 2013; Oliver-Smith, 2010) have expanded the notion of displacement to include cultural and psychological trauma. They emphasize that rehabilitation must account for “place attachment” — the emotional and symbolic bonds people have with their land and community. However, few Indian studies integrate this perspective within family-level analyses. The emotional dislocation experienced by displaced parents, children, and elders remains under-researched, despite its long-term implications for social well-being.

To sum up, existing literature provides rich insights into the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of displacement but leaves several critical gaps. There is a dearth of systematic sociological inquiry into how dam-induced displacement reconfigures family systems, alters livelihood strategies at the household level, and transforms intergenerational relations. Moreover, most studies treat displaced communities as homogeneous groups, overlooking intra-family differences and adaptation strategies.

The present research therefore situates itself at the intersection of family sociology and livelihood studies, applying both the Family Systems Theory and the IRR model to explore how families cope, adapt, and reconstruct

their lives in post-displacement contexts. By focusing on dam-affected regions of Odisha, this study contributes a fresh empirical perspective to the national debate on displacement and rehabilitation, bridging the existing gap between policy-oriented and family-centered research.

Identification of Research Gaps

Although a vast body of literature exists on development-induced displacement in India, most studies have focused on its economic and administrative dimensions, with limited attention to its sociological and familial implications. The issue of displacement caused by dam construction has been examined in terms of loss of land, livelihood, and inadequate rehabilitation measures; however, the ways in which such displacement reshapes the family as a social and emotional institution remain underexplored. The family, being the primary site of livelihood organization, social reproduction, and emotional security, undergoes profound structural and functional transformations during and after displacement yet this critical dimension is inadequately documented in existing research.

First, there is a gap in understanding the interlinkage between displacement and family systems. Most studies, such as those by Fernandes (1991, 2006) and Cernea (1997), emphasize macro-level impacts—economic loss, migration, and policy failure—but seldom explore how forced relocation affects intra-family relationships, authority structures, and kinship networks. The breakdown of joint families into nuclear units, the erosion of community-based support systems, and the emergence of gendered divisions of labor are not sufficiently studied from a sociological perspective. This gap limits our understanding of displacement as a lived social process, not merely an economic event.

Second, the livelihood aspect of displaced families is often treated narrowly in quantitative or economic terms, focusing on income restoration rather than livelihood sustainability and cultural continuity. Few studies consider how displaced families adapt their livelihood strategies in response to new environments, changing gender roles, and resource constraints. The qualitative dimensions of livelihood—such as dignity, autonomy, and identity—remain largely ignored in displacement research. The need to integrate livelihood analysis with family systems theory presents a significant research opportunity.

Third, there is inadequate regional and comparative research, particularly in eastern Indian states such as Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand, where displacement due to dams has been extensive. Studies on the Hirakud and Indravati projects, for instance, have documented economic losses but not the long-term socio-familial consequences. Comparative studies between old and recent dam-induced displacements are rare, which could reveal patterns of adaptation, generational differences, and the evolving nature of state rehabilitation policies.

Fourth, the psychological and emotional impacts of displacement on family members—especially women, children, and the elderly—remain an underexplored area. Displacement generates emotional distress, social isolation, and identity crises that affect family cohesion and well-being. However, most policy-oriented studies overlook these aspects, leading to incomplete rehabilitation frameworks that fail to address emotional recovery and social reintegration.

Fifth, there is a methodological gap in existing literature. Many studies are descriptive and lack an interdisciplinary approach combining sociology, economics, and human geography. Quantitative surveys dominate the field, while ethnographic and participatory research methods that capture family narratives and coping mechanisms are limited.

Finally, policy analysis in existing research is disconnected from family-level experiences. Rehabilitation programs are often evaluated in terms of compensation rates and infrastructure development rather than their impact on family resilience, livelihood continuity, or gender equity. There is little empirical evidence on how state policies influence family adaptation and well-being post-displacement.

Thus, the proposed study seeks to bridge these research gaps by adopting a family-centric, livelihood-oriented framework that integrates sociological theory, empirical fieldwork, and policy analysis. By focusing on the lived experiences of displaced families in Odisha, the research aims to contribute new knowledge on how displacement disrupts, reshapes, and redefines rural family systems, offering insights for more inclusive and humane rehabilitation policies.

Statement of the Problems

While displacement due to large development projects has been a long-debated issue, the specific focus on dam-induced displacement and its impact on rural family systems and livelihoods provides a fresh and in-depth perspective on the human dimensions of development. Unlike general studies on resettlement and rehabilitation, this topic emphasizes the micro-level socio-economic consequences faced by rural families — including the loss of land, livelihood, cultural ties, and community networks. It examines not only the economic implications but also the psychological, social, and cultural dislocations that occur when rural populations are uprooted from their ancestral lands. This holistic approach to understanding displacement distinguishes the research from conventional development studies.

The originality of this topic lies in its attempt to link displacement with the transformation of family structure, gender roles, and social relations in the post-displacement context. It seeks to understand how traditional rural livelihoods based on agriculture, fishing, or forest resources are affected and how families adapt through alternative occupations or migration.

Moreover, the study contributes new insights to policy and rehabilitation discourse by bringing forward the voices and lived experiences of displaced rural families, which are often neglected in official project evaluations. By combining sociological analysis with livelihood and development perspectives, this topic creates a multidisciplinary framework for understanding the true costs of dam projects.

Therefore, the research stands out as both socially relevant and academically innovative, offering valuable knowledge for policymakers, scholars, and communities concerned with sustainable development and social justice.

Objectives of the Study

The proposed research on “*Displacement and Livelihood: Impact of Dam-Induced Displacement on Rural Family*” aims to examine the far-reaching social, economic, and cultural consequences of dam-induced displacement on rural families in India, particularly focusing on the state of Odisha. The study seeks to understand how the forced relocation of communities due to large development projects affects family structure, livelihood patterns, gender relations, and overall well-being.

The primary objective of the research is to explore the changing dynamics of rural family systems under the pressures of displacement and to analyze how these transformations influence livelihood security, social cohesion, and identity. The study intends to bridge the gap between economic assessments of displacement and sociological analyses of family change.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To analyze the impact of dam-induced displacement on family structure and kinship relations, examining how resettlement affects joint and extended family systems, intergenerational bonds, and social support mechanisms.
2. To explore the gendered dimensions of displacement, understanding how roles, responsibilities, and economic participation of women and men are redefined in resettlement contexts.

Through these objectives, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of how displacement disrupts and reshapes the rural family system, thereby offering valuable insights for more family-sensitive and sustainable rehabilitation policies in India.

Expected Contribution of the Paper

The proposed research on “*Displacement and Livelihood: Impact of Dam-Induced Displacement on Rural Family*” aims to make significant academic, policy-oriented, and practical contributions. Dam-induced displacement has emerged as a critical social and developmental concern in India, where large-scale projects often result in the uprooting of rural communities. The study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how displacement affects the structure, function, and survival strategies of rural families, as well as to propose measures for sustainable rehabilitation and livelihood restoration.

A. Academic Contribution:

The study will add to the growing body of sociological and anthropological literature on development-induced displacement. While much research has focused on the economic and environmental dimensions of displacement, this study will emphasize the *family as a social unit*—examining how displacement reshapes kinship patterns, gender roles, and intergenerational relationships. By integrating sociological theories of social change and adaptation, the research will offer a holistic understanding of the social consequences of dam projects. It will also fill an existing gap in rural sociology by documenting lived experiences of displaced families and linking them to broader processes of modernization and state-led development.

B. Contribution to Policy and Practice:

The findings of the study will be valuable for policymakers, planners, and organizations involved in resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) programmes. By highlighting the inadequacies and gaps in current compensation and livelihood restoration mechanisms, the study will suggest ways to design more inclusive and sustainable R&R policies. It will emphasize that displacement should not merely be viewed as a technical or administrative challenge but as a profound social issue affecting community identity and long-term well-being. The research will contribute to improving the existing **Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy** by offering evidence-based recommendations grounded in field data and local realities.

C. Contribution to Development Studies and Livelihood Discourse:

This study will contribute to the discourse on livelihood sustainability in post-displacement contexts. It will explore how displaced families reconstruct their livelihoods through land-based and non-land-based means, such as wage labour, petty trade, or migration. The analysis of livelihood transition will help identify factors that enable or hinder successful adaptation. The findings will also be useful for development practitioners and NGOs working in livelihood restoration, offering insights into community participation, skill development, and micro-enterprise opportunities for displaced populations.

D. Socio-Cultural and Psychological Insights:

Another important contribution will be in understanding the socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of displacement. The study will document the loss of traditional networks, rituals, and community cohesion that accompany forced relocation. By doing so, it will shed light on the emotional and psychological trauma faced by displaced families, particularly women and children, who often experience the greatest burden of adaptation. This focus will broaden the debate on displacement from mere economic rehabilitation to the restoration of social and cultural well-being.

E. Empowerment and Awareness Generation:

At the community level, the research will contribute by giving voice to the displaced families themselves. Their narratives and experiences will form the foundation for advocating participatory approaches in planning and rehabilitation. The study will also create awareness among development agencies and the public about the hidden costs of displacement and the importance of ensuring social justice in development projects.

In essence, the research will make a comprehensive contribution by bridging the gap between theory and practice in understanding displacement. It will promote a more humane and sustainable approach to development—one that respects the rights, dignity, and livelihood security of rural families affected by dam-induced displacement. Ultimately, the study aims to support the goal of inclusive development and contribute to policy frameworks that balance economic growth with social equity.

Discussion and Finding

The proposed research on *Displacement and Livelihood: Impact of Dam-Induced Displacement on Rural Family* aims to generate empirical and analytical insights into how large-scale dam projects affect the social, economic,

and cultural dimensions of rural life. The expected outputs of this study will contribute both to academic understanding and policy formulation related to displacement, rehabilitation, and sustainable livelihoods.

Firstly, the study is expected to produce a comprehensive documentation of the lived experiences of displaced rural families. It will highlight how forced displacement disrupts livelihood patterns such as agriculture, animal husbandry, forest-based activities, and small-scale trade. The findings will show the extent to which traditional occupations are lost and the challenges families face in adapting to new livelihood environments. This documentation will provide a crucial base for understanding the multidimensional impact of dam-induced displacement beyond economic loss.

Secondly, the research will yield quantitative and qualitative data that reflect changes in household income, employment opportunities, land ownership, and access to natural resources before and after displacement. The data will allow for a comparative analysis of pre- and post-displacement living conditions, showing whether rehabilitation programs have succeeded in restoring livelihoods or deepened poverty and inequality.

Thirdly, the study is expected to generate insights into the social and psychological consequences of displacement on family structure and community relationships. It will explore how relocation affects kinship ties, social networks, and the traditional support systems that form the backbone of rural life. The study may reveal issues such as loss of community cohesion, changes in gender roles, intergenerational conflicts, and mental distress resulting from uncertainty and cultural dislocation.

Another major output will be the evaluation of rehabilitation and resettlement policies implemented by government authorities. By examining the adequacy and effectiveness of compensation packages, housing, land allocation, and skill development initiatives, the research will identify the gaps between policy intent and actual outcomes. This assessment will help in recommending policy reforms that ensure livelihood security and social justice for displaced populations.

Finally, the study is expected to produce policy recommendations and a conceptual framework for sustainable rehabilitation. It will emphasize the need for participatory planning, livelihood diversification, and community-based resource management. The findings will be useful for policymakers, NGOs, and researchers in designing displacement policies that are humane, inclusive, and development-oriented.

In sum, the expected output of this study will be a critical understanding of how dam-induced displacement transforms rural life and practical strategies to rebuild livelihoods with dignity and sustainability.

Relevance for Policy Making

The issue of dam-induced displacement has long been a critical concern in India's development discourse. While large dams are often justified as engines of economic growth, irrigation, and power generation, they simultaneously produce widespread social and economic disruptions for rural families forced to relocate. Understanding the impact of displacement on livelihood and family systems is therefore essential for effective and humane policy formulation.

Firstly, dam-induced displacement directly affects the livelihood structure of rural families. Most displaced families depend primarily on agriculture, forests, and rivers for their subsistence. When their lands are submerged, they lose not only their property but also their traditional means of livelihood and socio-economic security. Rehabilitation policies often provide monetary compensation, but this rarely restores the long-term economic stability of the displaced. Thus, research on this topic provides crucial evidence for policymakers to design livelihood-oriented rehabilitation frameworks, ensuring that displaced populations are not left in perpetual poverty after relocation.

Secondly, the social and familial consequences of displacement must be integrated into policy considerations. Forced migration fractures community bonds, traditional kinship systems, and support networks that are vital for the emotional and economic well-being of rural families. Women, children, and the elderly face specific hardships—loss of social roles, increased workload, and limited access to education and healthcare in resettled areas. Policies that focus solely on compensation or physical resettlement, without addressing social reintegration and psychological rehabilitation, often fail to achieve genuine development. Therefore, evidence from such studies can guide policymakers to adopt a holistic approach, including social welfare, education, and gender-sensitive measures within resettlement programmes.

Thirdly, research on dam-induced displacement highlights the gap between policy intent and implementation. Although India has formulated guidelines such as the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy (NRRP) 2007, ground realities reveal inadequate planning, poor participation of affected communities, and lack of monitoring mechanisms. By studying the real impact on rural families, policymakers can identify weaknesses in current frameworks and adopt more participatory and transparent decision-making processes. Incorporating affected people in the planning and implementation of rehabilitation ensures that policies are both equitable and sustainable.

Additionally, the topic has broader relevance for environmental and development policy. Large-scale displacement often leads to ecological degradation, deforestation, and changes in land use patterns. Understanding these interactions enables policymakers to balance economic development with environmental sustainability. It encourages the adoption of alternative models of development, such as smaller, decentralized water projects that minimize displacement and ecological harm.

Finally, research on this issue contributes to social justice and human rights-based policymaking. Displacement without adequate rehabilitation violates the rights to livelihood, housing, and dignity guaranteed by the Constitution of India. Policies influenced by such research can ensure that development projects adhere to principles of fairness, equity, and accountability. This aligns with global frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

Therefore, studying the impact of dam-induced displacement on rural families is profoundly relevant for policymaking. It helps the state design inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development policies that prioritize human welfare alongside economic growth. Effective policies based on such research can transform displacement from a process of marginalization into an opportunity for social and economic empowerment.

Conclusion

Displacement caused by large dam projects has far-reaching consequences on the livelihood and social fabric of rural families. While such projects are often justified in the name of national development, the human cost associated with them cannot be overlooked. The findings of this study highlight that dam-induced displacement leads to significant disruption in the economic stability of rural households. Loss of agricultural land, traditional occupations, and access to natural resources directly affects income sources, pushing many families into poverty and insecurity. Moreover, displacement results in social and cultural disintegration. Rural families, who once lived in cohesive communities with strong kinship ties, often find themselves scattered in resettlement areas with unfamiliar social environments. This weakens traditional support systems and affects intergenerational relationships. The younger generation may adapt more quickly to new conditions, but the elderly often struggle to cope with the loss of identity, belonging, and cultural continuity. In addition, inadequate rehabilitation and resettlement policies exacerbate the hardships faced by displaced families. Lack of proper compensation, insufficient infrastructure, and limited livelihood opportunities hinder their ability to rebuild their lives. This underscores the need for more inclusive, participatory, and sustainable development policies.

In conclusion, dam-induced displacement is not merely a physical relocation but a complex socio-economic transformation that deeply impacts rural families. Effective policy interventions, focusing on livelihood restoration, social integration, and cultural preservation, are essential to ensure that development does not come at the cost of human well-being and dignity.

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