

# BioSoc: the Biodiversity and Society Bulletin

Research highlights on biodiversity and society, poverty and conservation

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## RESETTLEMENT AS A CONSERVATION TOOL: MORE MYTH THAN REALITY?

The human impact of protected areas continues to dominate the literature on poverty-conservation links. A recent issue of *Conservation and Society* focusses on the debate surrounding displacement and relocation. Rangarajan and Shahabuddin set the scene with an analysis of the situation in India and this is supplemented by similar studies by McElwee for Southeast Asia and by Goodall for Australia. Despite the different geographies, a common theme emerges from these three analyses: local people are often the focus of those concerned with the impacts of people on protected areas when they are often not the greatest threat. The authors highlight some of the politics behind displacements, noticing that it is often minority groups that are targetted while the more powerful players – including mining and tourism companies aswell, in some cases, as park authorities – are left to their own devices. As a result, resettlement does not address the root causes of biodiversity loss.

Another theme that emerges from these papers is the lack of dialogue between biologists and social scientists. This has the effect of reinforcing entrenched positions, prohibiting any real attempt to better understand each others' science and each others' perspectives: "The chasm between biologists' and social scientists' perspectives on relocation issues is widened by the fact that neither group attempts to derive insights from the scholarship of the other". Goodall notes that not only do biological and social scientists need to get better at talking to each other, but they also need to develop more effective relationships for collaborative research with the local people whose lands and livelihoods are at issue.

Reconciling the social and the biological, the scientific and the traditional knowledge is clearly important but, as Redford and Sanderson point out, not enough to cure "the struggles of the poor and the endangered". The issue at stake, they note, is one of competing moral positions. While these competing positions may be defensible, the use of inappropriate, or inefficient tools, is less so. A lot is assumed rather than known, about displacement as a conservation tool – both in terms of its efficacy, scale, and severity of impact. Brockington and Igoe note the paucity of evidence documenting evictions from protected areas while McElwee highlights that lack of evidence to support the hypothesis that resettlement reduces conservation threats. Brockington and Igoe pick up on this, noting that while there are few studies that provide good information on the social impacts of evictions there are fewer still that examine ecological impacts: "evictions are carried out in Nature's name but often in surprising ignorance of Nature's processes".

Conservationists have the most to lose from not addressing this problem. Although evictions are implemented by state agencies, the reputation of conservation organisations is often muddled by association. To avoid this reputational risk, it behoves conservationists to take the lead in exploring the conditions under which co-existence can be an effective alternative to displacement. "By taking a moral high ground, conservation sets itself a high standard for behaviour, lest it be vulnerable to charges of immoral behaviour – just the charges that are brought about when displacement occurs."

## SOURCE

Rangarajan, M and Shahabuddin, G (2006) *Displacement and Relocation from Protected Areas: Towards a Biological and Historical Synthesis*. Conservation and Society Vol 4, No 3, 359 – 378

Redford, KH and Sanderson SE (2006) *No Roads, Only Directions*. Conservation and Society Vol 4, No 3, 379-382

Goodall, H (2006) *Exclusion and Re-emplacment: Tensions around Protected Areas in Australia and Southeast Asia*. Conservation and Society Vol 4, No 3, 383 – 395

McElwee, PD (2006) *Displacement and Relocation Redux: Stories from Southeast Asia*. Conservation and Society Vol 4, No 3, 396 – 403

Brockington, D and Igoe, J (2006) *Eviction for Conservation: A Global Overview*. Conservation and Society Vol 4, No 3, 424 – 470

All the papers can be downloaded from <http://www.conservationandsociety.org/vol-4-3-06.html>

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## BIOSOC

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