



PRESS RELEASE

Study on Long-term Impacts of Relocation from Porur Lake Released; Highlights Adverse Living Conditions after 13 Years of Resettlement

Chennai, 29 November 2019

At a press conference held in Chennai today, affected community members, social activists, and experts released a report titled, '**Deprivation by Design: An Assessment of the Long-term Impacts of Forced Relocation from Porur Lake.**' Published by Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities (IRCDUC), Chennai, and Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), Delhi, the report presents the findings of a comprehensive human rights assessment of the living conditions of persons evicted in 2006 from Porur Lake, which accounted for one of the earliest and largest eviction drives for the "restoration of water bodies" in Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu continues to witness widespread forced evictions, especially along water bodies in the state. These evictions have deleterious impacts on the lives and livelihoods of economically weaker sections (EWS); however, the scope of public discourse on the issue continues to be limited to treating the poor as "encroachers" without any deliberation on the violation of their constitutionally guaranteed rights. Though the scale of evictions has intensified since the 2015 Chennai floods, forced evictions and relocation of the urban poor under the guise of "restoration of water bodies" have been occurring across the state over the past two decades.

Porur Lake is a large water body located in southwest Chennai, surrounded by various 'informal settlements,' comprising over 10,700 families. In November 2006, the Public Works Department and the District Administration forcibly evicted these families without due process. Of the approximately 10,700 families evicted, only 4,000 families were provided alternative land in two sites, namely Collector Nagar, located in Gudapakkam in Tiruvallur District, and Nallur, located in Kancheepuram District. Both these sites are situated over 20 kilometres from Porur Lake. The study by IRCDUC and HLRN assessed the living conditions at both sites, as well as the eviction process preceding the relocation, using the human rights framework.

Major Findings of the Study:

- About 6,700 families evicted from Porur Lake in 2006 did not receive any relief or rehabilitation, including alternative accommodation, from the state.
- Both resettlement sites of Collector Nagar and Nallur, where families from Porur Lake have been relocated, are situated in interior and remote locations without adequate access to public transportation.
- Thirteen years after their eviction and resettlement, affected families in both settlements do not have access to basic amenities including roads, street lights, water, fair price/ration shops, *anganwadi* centres (AWC/crèches), water supply, and primary health centres.
- Even after 13 years, 84 per cent of men and 70 per cent of women continue to travel over 10 kilometres one way, every day, to reach their places of work.
- Children's education continues to be a major concern of affected families. In Collector Nagar, an AWC was started only 11 years after families moved there, while in Nallur, it took the state 10 years to set up a functional AWC.
- The unresolved strained relationship with host communities continues to result in insecurity for the resettled families.

The study highlights how the policies and practices of the Government of Tamil Nadu as well as several judgments of the Madras High Court have failed to acknowledge the historical marginalization process that has forced already deprived families to live along water bodies and then evicted them without adhering to due process. This has resulted in gross violations of the human rights of these communities. The state has also breached a range of national and international laws, policies, and human rights standards in the eviction and resettlement process related to Porur Lake.

Given the adverse living conditions at both sites, IRCUDC and HLRN propose the following recommendations to the Government of Tamil Nadu, in order to restore the human rights of those evicted from Porur Lake and other water bodies in Tamil Nadu; to improve living conditions in all resettlement sites; and, to prevent any further violations of human rights of the urban poor, as per its moral and legal commitments under national and international laws. These recommendations are also applicable to the 50,000 families residing along the water bodies in Chennai, who face an imminent threat of eviction.

- The Government of Tamil Nadu should ensure the equal right of women and men to protection from forced evictions and the equal enjoyment of the human right to adequate housing and security of tenure, by developing a state-level human right to adequate housing law, which commits to ending forced evictions and ensures the provision of legal security of tenure without any discrimination.
- The Department of Revenue and Disaster Management Department Government of Tamil Nadu should urgently develop a human rights-based, gender-sensitive, and child-friendly policy on rehabilitation and resettlement, in order to ensure a comprehensive and planned approach that respects the human rights of affected persons and adheres to national and international laws, policies, guidelines, and standards.
- Any resettlement provided by the state should be within a distance of three kilometres from people's original sites of residence.
- The Tamil Nadu State Land Use Board should officially announce an inclusive land reservation policy for deprived urban communities. Such a policy should focus on equitable spatial allocation of land for the poor, based on their proportion to the total population.

Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities, and Housing and Land Rights Network hope that the Government of Tamil Nadu pays heed to the findings of this study and implements the proposed recommendations, with the aim of restoring the human rights of the resettled communities and preventing any further human rights violations.

Quotes:

“The eviction process was insensitive, one child died in the process and an elderly couple lost their lives because they were trying to safeguard their belongings while the demolition process was going on. We are still denied basic facilities even 13 years after our relocation. We were displaced and forgotten by the government.” ~ *Families resettled in Collector Nagar in November 2006*

“The site is very unsafe and does not have adequate transportation facilities. Once a woman was almost abducted by a man, and as she tried to jump off the two-wheeler in an attempt to escape, she fell and suffered a fatal head injury that claimed her life. Ever since, we either walk or wait for someone to drop us at the bus stop.” ~ *Women residents of Nallur*

“All conservation and restoration programmes and processes should include the active participation of poor and marginalized communities. They should be seen as contributors to the process, and not targeted and discriminated against because of their poverty.” ~ *Vanessa Peter, Policy Researcher, IRCUDC*

“The tendency of the state to consider low-income marginalized communities as dispensable in its broader agenda of non-inclusive urbanization, while being discriminatory also violates national and international human rights law. Forced relocation to inadequate sites has had adverse, long-term impacts on the health, livelihoods, education, and security of displaced persons, whose voices and concerns continue to remain unheard and unaddressed.” ~ *Shivani Chaudhry, Executive Director, Housing and Land Rights Network*

Report available at: https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Deprivation_by_Design.pdf

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