

Assessment of Rehabilitation Policy for Sariska Tiger Reserve: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

The paper attempts to examine progress of rehabilitation policy for Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR) so far. In fact, relocation of human populations from the protected areas results in a host of socio-economic impacts. *The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972* was amended in 1982, 1986, 1991, 2003, and 2006 and provides for the creation of the different categories of PAs, limits the right to live inside PAs (of national park and sanctuary categories), puts restrictions on harvesting of natural products, and establishes a centralized and exclusive management of STR in Alwar District of Rajasthan was declared a sanctuary in 1959 and the Tiger Reserve in 1978-79, and a National Park in 1992. Keeping in view the issue of survival challenge for Tigers in the Sariska National Park, Sariska some kind of rehabilitation was necessary.

In 1980, one village (71 families) was removed by force to avoid conflicts with tigers. The relocation was very ineffective and some villagers even came back to their original settlements. There are still 24 villages in the core zone of the park and 246 in the buffer zone. The relocation of 11 villages from the core zone is already planned. The relocation was proposed specifically to enable the reintroduction of tigers, which were found to have disappeared by 2005. Consequently, only one village Bhagani is a success story of rehabilitation policy during the year 2007 and remaining attempts are almost failure. Main hindrances are lack of effective implementation of rehabilitation policy, not involving locals and noncommittal of government.

KEYWORDS: STR, TR, PAs, Rehabilitation, Policy.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of displacement and rehabilitation of people wildlife areas is a recurrent and central theme in the context of crises in nature conservation in India. Displacement, carried out to enhance levels of nature protection, has often been accompanied by impoverishment and dispossession of the displaced. Relocation of human populations from within areas notified for wildlife conservation (protected areas or PAs) has been undertaken in several countries, as a means of trying to reduce pressures on wildlife. India is one of the countries where the issue of relocation has lately acquired centre-stage in debates on biodiversity conservation. Between 1969 and 2001, the area under National Parks and Sanctuaries in India grew tenfold, to five per cent of the total landscape (Rangarajan 2001, pp. 30-35). Only a small part of this land was cleared of all human habitation, yet it is a central point of conflict and a critical aspect of policy. While displacement from Tiger Reserves in India since 1973 may have officially affected 80 villages and 2900 families, the actual numbers may be far higher. The recent Tiger Task Force Report calls for priority to be given to relocation from the core areas of the Tiger Reserves while calling for a transparent, just and open process of decision-making (Ministry of Environment Forests 2005).

Biologists and social scientists often examine different parts of a large complex picture and also have different ways of asserting a argument. Biologists mostly focus on the impacts of differing kinds of human use of the ecosystem, with species and ecosystems at the epicenter. Biologists tend to assess the issue of relocation in terms of the viability of habitats, ecosystems and endangered species. Conflicts with peoples resident inside protected areas (PAs) can be intense with high rates of loss of livestock and crops and even on occasion, of human lives (Madhusudan and Mishra 2003; Treves and Karanth 2003).

Human habitation and uses of natural resources are prohibited or severely restricted within most PAs. There are three to four million people living inside these PAs and several million more in adjacent or nearby areas, whose livelihoods depend on natural resources from these PAs (Kothari et al. 1995, pp. 68-74). These local communities often have unclear or unregistered right to natural resources and lands. Moreover, many development facilities (access to basic amenities, transport, health and education facilities, land development, etc.) do not reach adequately to villages located inside PAs.

Hence, local communities inside PAs have varying access to natural resources for survival and livelihoods, but often also live in a state of deprivation, poverty and in conflict with PA managers, who usually perceive them as being responsible for the loss of wildlife.

Biologists and forest mangers see displacement of ecosystem-dependent people as unavoidable to secure large 'inviolable' areas of wilderness where the needs of biodiversity conservation can be prioritized (Terborgh et al. 2002; Johnsingh 2005; Karanth 2006).

An increasing number of scientific studies point to the habitat degradation caused by biomass extraction such as grazing, fuel wood collection and commercial non-timber forest produce (NTFP) extraction inside areas set aside for biodiversity conservation (Siebert 2004; Karanth et al. 2005). In Sariska Tiger Reserve, adverse changes in vegetation structure and plant species composition were caused by chronic biomass extraction that was likely affecting forest avifauna as well (Kumar and Shahabuddin 2005). biologists therefore emphasis the fact that some amount of inviolable zone (strictly protected area) is required to maintain the entire spectrum of biodiversity as well as to minimize conflicts with large mammalian fauna (Terborgh et al. 2002; Ministry of Environment and Forests 2005).

STUDY AREA

The Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR) is situated in Alwar district of Rajasthan state. Sariska became a Tiger Reserve and a National Park in 1978 under the wildlife protection act of 1972. Sariska Tiger Reserve covers an area of 866 km² in the district of Alwar of Rajasthan. Sariska Tiger Reserve lies between 27° 05' N and 27° 33' N and 76° 17' E and 76° 34' E (Fig. 1). It is classified as a part of semi-arid zone of north-western India.

The area is seasonally dry with an average annual rainfall of 650 mm and extremes of temperature with cold winters and hot summers. The forest is typical dry deciduous, dramatically changing with the change in season. The terrain is undulating plateau and wide valleys. STR is famous for both its spectacular mammal wildlife and its pastoralist populations, living inside the 27 hamlets scattered over core of the reserve. The temples of Bhartihari, Pandupole and Narayani Mata are also situated in Sariska Tiger Reserve (Govt. of Rajasthan, 2004).

LOCATION MAP Sariska Tiger Reserve

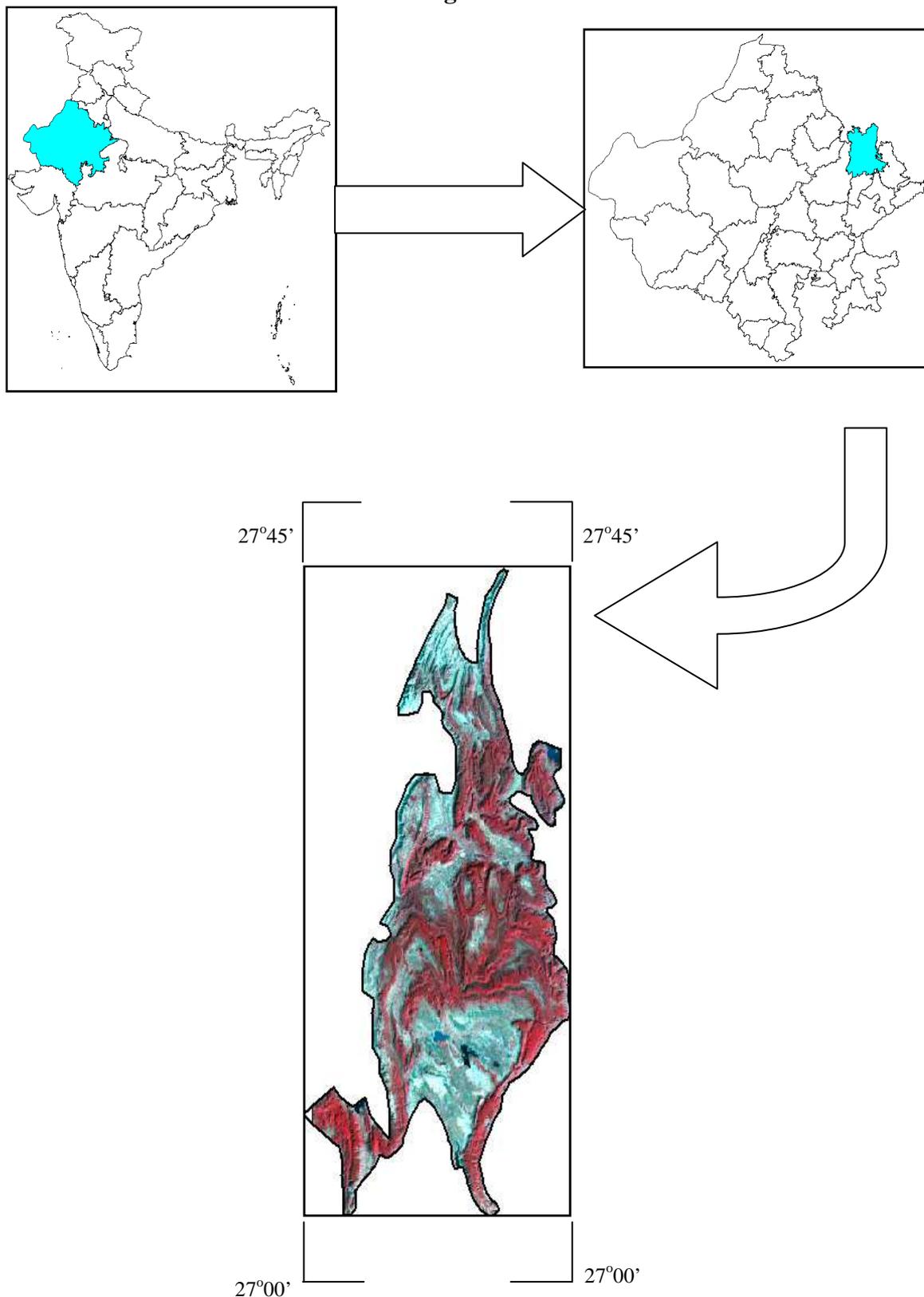


Fig. 1

OBJECTIVE

To describe rehabilitation Policy, issues and Challenges of STR.

DATA BASE

Secondary Data Sources

- i. Census of India: District Census Handbook Alwar: 1981, 1991 and 2001.
- ii. District Statistical Abstract of Alwar (2006), Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Jaipur.
- iii. The topographical sheets number - 54A/1, A/2, A/3, A/4, A/5, A/6, A/7 to 54A/8, Survey of India, New Delhi.

Primary Data Sources

Primary data will be necessary for the confirmation of the ground realities for unsupervised classification and other analysis for the study. Selection of villages will be made from the entire group of core and buffer zone villages accordingly with purposive method of sampling for the ground truth certification.

METHODOLOGY:

The study area selected for present research covers in parts of eight Survey of India toposheets (54 A/1, A/2, A/3, A/4, A/5, A/6, A/7 and 54 A/8). To prepare single base map these toposheets have been georeferenced and mosaiced. The study area is cropped from georeferenced and mosaiced Survey of India toposheets from the digitized Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR) boundary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sariska National Park and TR, Rajasthan: Declared a sanctuary in 1959, a TR in 1978-79, and a national park in 1992. The Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan, Western India, Where the tiger was recently reported to have become locally extinct, is a case in point. In February 2005, an Indian newspaper reported the shocking story that the tiger population of Sariska, already highly depleted to less than ten individuals by 2004, had been poached out of existence. It was suspected that well-organized poaching gangs had hunted out the last few tigers, possibly with the connivance of some local villagers. This extinction crisis, did not bring, as hoped by many, a deeper delving into the long-term causes of habitat degradation or tiger poaching by the management. Soon after, a long-dormant (and highly inadequate) plan for relocation of eleven villages from the core area of the Reserve was revived. The aim was to create a 'people-free zone' in Sariska without any idea of how this would help. The total Area of Sariska Tiger Reserve is divided mainly into core and Buffer Zone (Fig. 2).

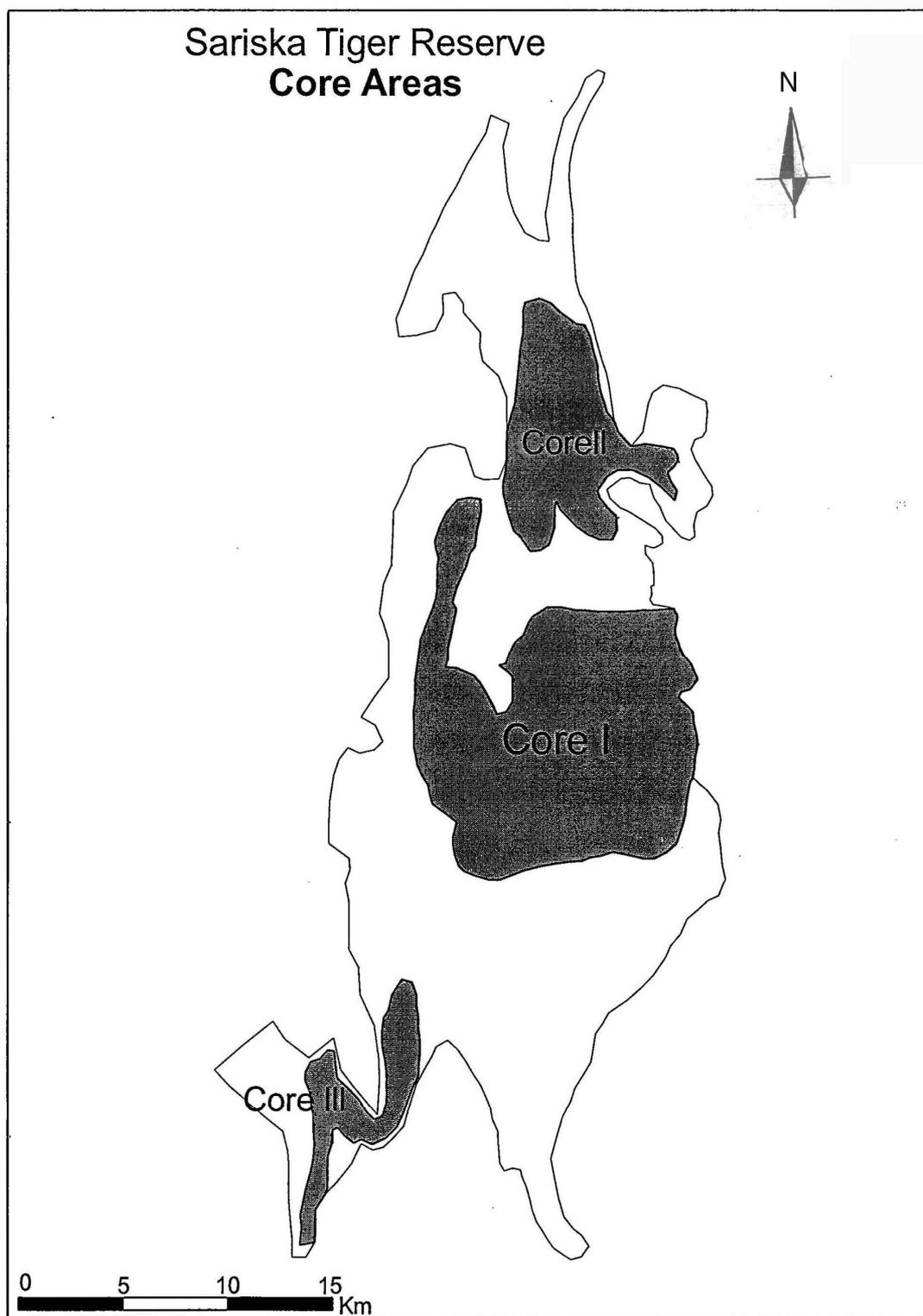


Fig. 2

As the report of a governmental committee, set up after the tiger crisis, says: 'In Sariska, all the reasons responsible for disappearance of tigers in Toto zero in on one single factor and that is the large number of villages inside the Reserve, where no successful rehabilitation of villages has ever taken place. Therefore poachers could shelter in the villages of the area and kill tigers' and 'tigers and people do not coexist. Wherever villages exist, the tigers in the vicinity have slowly perished'.

As successive management plans for the Reserve indicate, the emphasis in management strategy had always been on relocation and curtailment of rights of residents, belonging to the largely pastoral Gujjar community, to whose activities-in the form of grazing, fodder-collection and fuel wood use-forest degradation was wholly ascribed (Johari *in press*). Patterns of resource extraction over the last few decades have resulted in declines in habitat-selective animal species and adverse changes in tree composition and structure (Shahabuddin and Kumar 2005). It was clear by 2005 that a substantial proportion of Sariska was too degraded to support any mammalian prey or predator species (see also Johnsingh et al. 1997). The linkages between forest use and biodiversity decline are more nuanced (Shahabuddin et al. 2005). The linkages between forest use and biodiversity decline are more complex than normally believed. For instance, even causal visits revealed that much of the extractive pressure on the Reserve is generated by adjacent urban centre. No attempt has so far been made to compare the quantum of biomass extraction from the towns (and villages) surrounding the tiger Reserve to that originating from the resident villages. Indeed, this contribution of external factors to forest degradation was not even recognized in the management plans for the Reserve (Government of Rajasthan 2004). Forest managers have also consistently ignored the contributions of departmentally-run commercial forestry to forest degradation, many of whose effects are still manifested in the forests of Sariska. What was further ignored in the public discourse over the Sariska tiger crisis was the bitter history of administrative misgovernance including ineffective forest protection from commercial interests, inequitable relocations in the past and gradual tightening of restrictions over legitimate resident rights without provision of alternatives (Shahabuddin et al. 2005; Johari *in press*). With no security of livelihoods, local people maximized their short-term gains from the forest in whatever way they could. For instance, practices like ecologically damaging goat-rearing evolved as a direct response to banning of agriculture in the villages.

A Bitter History: Past Village Relocation from Sariska Tiger Reserve

In post-independence India the first instance of village relocation from Sariska ordered by the state, dates back to the 1970s when Karnakawas and Kraska villages were relocated to Sirwas (near Silisere, Alwar district) and Bandipul (near Ajabgarh, Alwar district). It was on November 25, 1975, that the then district magistrate issued a notification for the settlement of rights for the villages of Karnakawas and Kiraska. People living in these villages were asked to inform the administration of their claims by January 28, 1976. On April 21, 1976 a notification of the Rajasthan Government denitrified the Rundh Bandipul and Rundh Dulwa Reserved Forest land into revenue lands for purposes of relocation. Similarly, the land at Sirawas was also denitrified from Reserved Forest status vide Government of Rajasthan order dated March 23, 1976. While in Rundh Sirawas, 750 bighas 12 were denitrified, 251.19 bighas were recorded as denitrified in Rundh Bandipul and 244.4 bighas in Rundh Dulwana. In presently time, STR is divided mainly into three core and Buffer zone with name of villages (Table-1).

Table-1.
Name of Villages in Core Area and Buffer Area

Core Area-I	Core Area-II	Core Area-III	Buffer Zone	
Kankwari (Rajgarh Tehsil)	Panidal (Alwar Tehsil)	Guwara Dulawa (Thanagazi Tehsil)	Kanlyawas (Rajgarh Tehsil)	Tehla (Rajgarh Tehsil)
Dabli (Alwar Tehsil)		Guwara Bandipul (Thanagazi Tehsil)	Muthrawat (Rajgarh Tehsil)	Talab (Rajgarh Tehsil)
Rothkala (Alwar Tehsil)			Madhogarh (Alwar Tehsil)	Murlipura (Rajgarh Tehsil)
Bhaghani (Rajgarh Tehsil)			Kushalgarh (Alwar Tehsil)	Ghewar (Rajgarh Tehsil)
Raika Mala (Thanagazi Tehsil)			Maon (Alwar Tehsil)	Dabkan (Rajgarh Tehsil)
Raika Mala (Thanagazi Tehsil)			Garh (Rajgarh Tehsil)	Rundh Sirawas (Alwar Tehsil)
New Kundalka (Thanagazi Tehsil)			Rajor (Rajgarh Tehsil)	Nagalheri (Thanagazi Tehsil)
Haripura (Rajgarh Tehsil)			Tiwad (Rajgarh Tehsil)	Duharamala (Thanagazi Tehsil)
Kroska (Alwar Tehsil)			Nawadi (Rajgarh Tehsil)	Gordhanpura (Rajgarh Tehsil)
Tonda (Alwar Tehsil)			Kalachara (Alwar Tehsil)	Mallana (Rajgarh)
Deori (Rajgarh Tehsil)			Toda Jaisinghpura (Rajgarh Tehsil)	Sitawat (Rajgarh Tehsil)
Sukola (Alwar Tehsil)				

Source: Computation by the researcher.

In 1977, the actual process of relocation of people from Kraska and Karanakawas began. Kraska was thereafter declared as forest land and the villagers were only given permission to perform religious activities at their 'devsthan' (sacred site) and use the public road (Table-1). However, out of the 19 families that were allotted land, nine sold their lands off and came back to the reserve along with other landless people, mainly setting near the village known as Kundalka (Fig. 3).

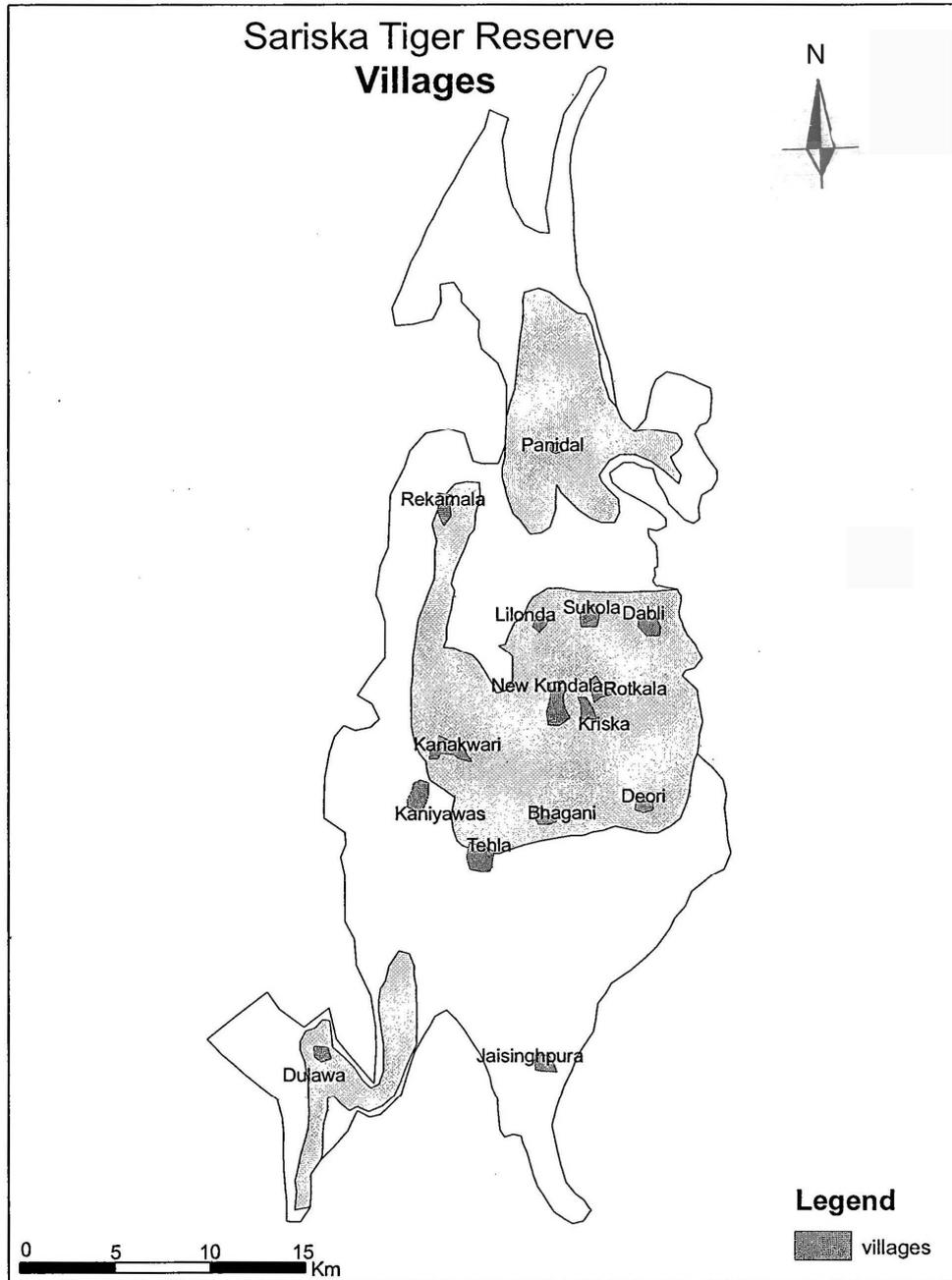


Fig. 3

Most of the forest department officials see this incident as an exploitative mechanism by local villagers to benefit from both their allotted lands (through sales) while not giving up their rights inside the reserve. However, when confronted with these questions the villagers blamed the forest department for the debacle and alleged that the promises made to them regarding the new site were not fulfilled. For example, they were not provided even the basic amenities at the site. Even the land was not fit for cultivation at the time they were asked to settle there. Above all, they were compelled to accept whatever meagre compensation was provided. They were given compensation on one hand and were made to pay back the amount in many cases as pending 'fines', on the other hand.

Policy and Legislative Background

There are a few national and state laws, policies or programmes governing or related to displacement of local communities from PAs.

Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 : This Act was amended in 1982, 1986, 1991, 2003, and 2006 and provides for the creation of the different categories of PAs, limits the right to live inside PAs (of national park and sanctuary categories), puts restrictions on harvesting of natural products, and establishes a centralized and exclusive management.

National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation 2007: The new (2008) centrally-sponsored scheme on PA-related relocation specifies that relocation should be "voluntary and in conformity with" the provisions of this national policy.

Centrally-Sponsored Schemes: Till 2008, relocation from PAs was funded through the centrally-sponsored beneficiary oriented scheme for tribal villages of project tiger areas, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, framed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in 1989-90. The compensation package of Rs 1,00,000 under this scheme has been increased to Rs 10 Lakh (One million) in the scheme on "Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats", in the 11th Five-Year Plan. A similar scheme is applicable for tiger reserves (TR).

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Village relocation has clearly emerged as an important issue in conservation that needs to be examined far more closely than it has been in the past. It would be an understatement to say that the earlier relocation experience was not smooth sailing, as accepted by the officials as well as the villagers. The way in which villagers were evicted from the reserve itself appears highly problematic in the context of the democratic policy of India. History is likely to play an important role in current relationships between people and Forest Department which is marked by conflict and distrust. The development of infrastructural facilities in the new sites before actual relocation becomes very important because most of the people from within Reserve are in process of changing their livelihood options. Finally, in the absence of a minimum regular income at the relocation site for certain initial period, people will be hesitant to move because changes in occupation and adjustment into a new economic system do not allow them sufficient leverage to explore new possibilities. A rethinking of the Sariska village relocation plan is urgently needed, particularly in context of larger questions of Protected Area policy and implementation and interpretation of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972). Arbitrary and unjust displacement without a care for the aspirations of those who are moved is not only ethically unacceptable. It also goes against the grain of a more effective approach to nature conservation. Larger issues of an implicit political nature impinge on how events unfold. The maturing of electoral democracy and the assertion of once marginal groups has not redressed the balance of power in a very hierarchical society. But it has definitely made coercion more problematic and may open up spaces for more just approaches in biodiversity conservation.

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