

Gujjar community resettlement from Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand, India

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SUMMARY

The Gujjar Rehabilitation Programme (Uttarakhand, India) is an integrated approach focusing on environmental conservation and providing better livelihood opportunities for pastoral Gujjar communities. The primary objective of this present study is to assess the response of rehabilitated Gujjar families to the resettlement Programme. Socio-economic assessments (e.g. livelihood status) of affected people at the two resettlement sites (Pathri and Gaidikhatta) were conducted. Resettled Gujjars reported enhancement of their livelihoods and many more children receiving schooling. Additionally, state government departments and several NGOs are making efforts to strengthen the prospects of Gujjar women through training and education programmes.

BACKGROUND

The sustainable development approach currently being promoted in India by government agencies seeks to encourage social change in remote villages in order to secure participation of these communities in biodiversity conservation through ecologically sound and culturally appropriate means of enhancing livelihoods (Mishra *et al.* 2009). Relocation of village communities has emerged as an important and contentious component of some such initiatives that needs to be examined more closely than it has been in the past (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin 2006).

In the Himalayan region of northern India, the Gujjars (a nomadic pastoral community) are an important historical tribe, who came to the Shivalik Hills (southern Himalayas) from Jammu (north-west India) nearly 200 years ago (TRCF 2007). Here they raised domesticated buffalo and practiced pastoralism, spending autumn (approximately October to April) in the Shivalik and the summer and the rainy season (May to September) in Himalayan alpine pastures. Gujjar livelihood is primarily based around rearing

buffalo and cattle, and selling milk in local markets.

A typical Gujjar family has 15-20 buffalos whilst relatively better off families may own 30-40 buffalo.

In the Rajaji National Park (RNP) Uttarakhand (northwest India), 512 Gujjar families were estimated to be present in 1985, increasing to 1,390 by 1998. In 2000, this equated to nearly 6,000 people with an estimated 13,000 livestock in RNP. In addition to the Gujjar-owned livestock, approximately 3,000 other, locally-owned, cattle grazed within the park boundaries. Over the years, the livestock over-grazing and the lopping of trees for fodder opened up the forest favouring the establishment of many weed species, including the highly invasive *Lantana camara*. Livestock competes with wild animals for water and grazing resources. Gujjars traditionally construct their deras (simple dwellings) near to water holes and, at RNP, dung deposited by livestock polluted these water sources. This, coupled with human disturbance,

resulted in large areas becoming unsuitable for use by wild mammals and other wildlife. This present study reports on the Gujjar Rehabilitation Programme, an ongoing, long-term integrated approach to relocate Gujjar communities from the RNP. It highlights its impact on those people relocated, and complements the study of the responses of vegetation and wild mammals in areas from which Gujjar families were relocated (Joshi & Singh 2009).

ACTION

Study areas: Two Gujjar rehabilitation sites (adjoining protected Lesser Himalayan Zone forest habitats), Pathri (268 ha) and Gandikhatta (755 ha) 15-20 km from Haridwar city (Haridwar district) were selected. Both sites are well-connected to road and rail networks. Rajaji National Park (29°15'-30°31' N 77°52'-78°22' E), the locality from which the Gujjar families were relocated, covers an area of 820 km² at an altitude varying from 250-1,100 m in and around the Shivalik foothills. Rajaji National Park (Elephant Reserve No. 11. in the Lesser Himalayas and Upper Gangetic Plains) was established in 1983 with the aim of maintaining a viable Asian elephant *Elephas maximus* population and is designated a reserved area for 'Project Elephant' (Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India).

Resettlement: In view of provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act (1972) and park designation, the first attempt to resettle Gujjars was made in 1984, by the then Uttar Pradesh state government, but this was not successful. At the time of establishment of RNP, 512 Gujjar families had a permit for residing inside the park area and were identified for relocation to Pathri within an 80 ha area of reserve forest in Haridwar forest division. However, no families were relocated at this time and slowly numbers increased. A major issue was that the Gujjars insisted on allocation of separate land for each family at rehabilitation sites. The case was assigned to the High Court and due to some political interference the programme progressed only very slowly. By 1994-1995 the number of families had increased to 1,390. During 1996 the first families were rehabilitated at Pathri. After establishment of Uttarakhand state (November 2000) the programme developed rapidly. At Gaidikhatta, rehabilitation commenced during

2003. Each family was given Rs. 2,000 to assist with moving and allocated a site upon which to locate their house. They were permitted to collect timber from nearby forest for house construction. Additionally, each family was given 0.8 ha of arable land, for vegetable and cereal crop cultivation. Uttarakhand state government provided necessary basic facilities including provision of drinking water, toilets, medicare, access roads to the new villages, primary schools, solar electric fencing, midday-meal scheme (providing food to primary level students during schooling), Angan bari Yojna (supporting rural children and women at their kitchen garden and villages), a widow pension scheme for the physically challenged, regular veterinary doctor visits, establishment of a fair price shop, and issuing of ration cards.

Community interviews: Interviews were made with 73 Gujjar families regarding their livelihood status during 2000-2002, prior to re-settlement. After the re-settlement, both the rehabilitation sites were incorporated in surveys relating to livelihood and socio-economic aspects (e.g. living standards, education and women empowerment) during March 2005 to June 2008. In-depth structured interviews with 47 families at Pathri and 70 at Gaidikhatta were analysed. Surveys of all local schools were undertaken to assess the view of Gujjar children towards education, and their attendance; from the early stages of the Programme the state government aimed to provide primary education to every child. Interviews were also conducted with 83 women to assess the impact of various ongoing training schemes (e.g. sewing, knitting and making of handicraft items) and education programmes (e.g. health care) by Programme representatives (e.g. forestry officials and NGO personnel). The author also participated in meetings organized by the forest department and NGOs at the rehabilitation sites to gather further knowledge on experiences of the Gujjars involved. Following the interviews, a database on Gujjar's perception was established.

The key questions asked to Gujjar families shifted to rehabilitation sites were:

1. Are you completely satisfied with the rehabilitation programme?
2. If you are given the opportunity, do you wish to return back to the forest life?

3. What is your present occupation/condition; have you seen some changes in your livelihood status?
4. Are your children obtaining education?
5. Is the forest and its wildlife benefited through this programme?
6. What should be done in the near future to make this programme more comfortable?

The key questions to Gujjar families still residing inside the forest were:

1. Do you wish to resettle at a rehabilitation site or do you want to stay in the forest?
2. What challenges you are facing inside the forest?
3. What about education, health and other facilities?
4. If you are given an opportunity to shift to rehabilitation site, what about your cattle?
5. Have you approached the concerned official/state government departments regarding to your rehabilitation?
6. What is your opinion of the conservation of the forest and its wildlife, especially when you are living amongst it?

CONSEQUENCES

Resettlement: In 1998, 1,390 families were present in the park area, 512 families were resettled to Pathri and 613 to Gaidikhatta. Slowly during 2000 to 2007, other families were also moved. Currently only 93 families (residing in the Gohri and Chillawali forest range of RNP) are to be relocated (Table 1).

Gujjar satisfaction: Based on interviews, it was revealed that the resettled Gujjars are satisfied with the process and ongoing benefits experienced through the programme and consider it has improved their livelihood. Resettled Gujjars at Pathri acknowledged that their previous nomadic life-style had denied them modern facilities, but that they now enjoy the benefits of, for example: mobile phones, electricity, running water, more stable livelihoods, upward mobility and integration into the social mainstream. Some principle benefits included:

1. *The right to vote.* Before the programme the Gujjars led a nomadic life and never registered to vote; now all are registered on the electoral roll.
2. *Improved education and health awareness.* They see the benefits of education and are making efforts to send their children to school. Women have started to regularly attend local government-run health camps to seek medical help during illness, pregnancy and childbirth.
3. *Change in lifestyle.* The resettled Gujjars have learnt how to cultivate various crops (e.g. sugarcane, wheat, rice and maize) and vegetables. They have mobile phones and some home appliances. One family has earned enough to purchase their own truck to carry products from Himachal Pradesh for sale in Delhi and Mumbai.
4. Some are now working with government and non-government organizations, and are involved in training programmes.

Table 1. Number of Gujjar families rehabilitated from the eight hill ranges in Rajaji National Park during the ongoing Gujjar rehabilitation programme 1996-2010.

Range	No. of families	Families rehabilitated at Pathri	Families rehabilitated at Gaidikhatta	Total families	Remaining
Chillawali	260	2	206	208	52
Chilla	193	-	193	193	-
Haridwar	254	188	66	254	-
Ramgarh	99	42	57	99	-
Kansrao	85	43	42	85	-
Motichur	115	102	13	115	-
Dholkh and Beribara	235	135	100	235	-
Gohri	149	-	108	108	41
Total	1390	512	785	1297	93

- Some international organizations have provided guidance on livestock management, and Veterinary Mission (a US based organization) gives periodic training.

Based on the interviews held with Gujjars before the resettlement programme (2000-2002), it was revealed that out of total correspondents (n=73), 57.5% (n=42) families showed their interest to move outside from the forest but notably 42.4% (n=31) had not responded the question. Questions related to impact on wildlife showed that only 9.5% (n=7) families accepted that wildlife is being affected due to biotic pressure whereas 90.4% (n=66) did not answer the question. Similarly, question related to infrastructure (education, medicare facilities etc.) revealed that 100% of the families (n=73) wished for infrastructure improvements (Table 2).

After the resettlement of the Gujjar, key questions asked of 117 families in 2006-2007 revealed that 95.7% (n=112) families were completely satisfied with rehabilitation programme; 4.2% (n=5) did not respond. Most significantly, 100% (n=117) of the families accepted that there was a beneficial change in their livelihood and that they are now enjoying urban, developed life. In addition, all families 100% (n=117) preferred the better education facilities although, 34.1% (n=40) wanted a

college for higher education to be established in the future. Remarkably, 34.1% (n=40) families believed that wildlife may have benefited with rehabilitation programme, although 65.8% (n=77) of the families did not answer the question (Table 3).

Education: Traditionally, Gujjars were educated in ‘Madrasah’ by Muslim clerics (Maulvi) and in several areas (both inside and outside RNP) Gujjar children are still being educated in Madrasah. However, the number of pupils has slowly increased in junior schools; currently 890 attend. With the aim of providing the opportunity of education for every child, the state government runs one school at Pathri (primary to junior high school) and two schools (one primary and one junior high) at Gaindikhatta. Several NGOs and state government departments provide support in enhancing school education. At the commencement of Programme in 1996 at Pathri, a primary school was established by RNP administration and regulated by an NGO (Friends of Doon) starting with 30 pupils. Subsequently the state government has undertaken management of the school and increased the schooling level to junior high. In Gaindikhatta two primary schools were established soon after relocation of families (2003-2004) by the state education department and at one school education was increased to junior high school standard.

Table 2. Results of interviews with 73 families Gujjars prior to resettlement (2000-2002)

Questions	Yes	Did not respond
Interested in moving from forest	57.5% (n=42)	42.4% (n=31)
Accepted that wildlife is being affected due to biotic pressure	9.5% (n=7)	90.4% (n=66)
Desire for improved infrastructure (education, medicare facilities etc.)	100% (n=73)	

Table 3. Results of interviews with 117 families Gujjars after resettlement (2006-2007)

Questions	Yes	Did not respond
Completely satisfied with rehabilitation programme	95.7% (n=112)	4.2% (n=5)
Accepted that there is a change in their livelihood and they are now enjoying urban developed life	100% (n=117)	
Preferred better education facilities	100% (n=117)	
Wanted a college for higher education to be established in the future	34.1% (n=40)	
Believed that wildlife may have benefited with rehabilitation programme	34.1% (n=40)	65.8% (n=77)

At Gaidikhatta, 265 students are studying in one junior high school and 275 in another, whereas 350 students attend Pathri junior high school. Attendance by boys outnumbers that of girls (ratio 7:3). A reason for the lower number of girls attending is that they continue to study at Madrasah and are engaged in household work and other chores. Encouragingly, some children are going onto higher education; to date about 50 students are obtaining further education in Government Inter Colleges located near to rehabilitation sites. Other important innovative education efforts have been made by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI). These support education by providing books, school bags and uniforms.

Women empowerment: Though the central and state governments had previously launched several schemes for the betterment of rural women, Gujjar women reported that they were unable to take any advantage of these (TRCF 2007). At the commencement of resettlement to Pathri, specific efforts were made by government and NGOs directed to women empowerment. Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra, Wildlife Protection Society of India, Wildlife Trust of India and Future Vision (India) started training programmes for Gujjar women, and provided sewing machines, weaving equipment and other tools. Items including ropes, buckets, carpets and small bamboo furniture are being made. As most belong to Muslim groups, a problem that was quickly identified was education being provided by male trainers. To resolve this, NGOs provided women to organize workshops and to offer training. The state government is planning further initiatives at grass roots level to generate better incomes from products being made, based partly on action programmes for women of tribal communities in Kerala, southern India (Nidheesh 2009).

A detailed survey was also conducted at rehabilitation sites to reach to a conclusion in respect of women education and empowerment. To address this, 83 interviews were conducted based on family's socio-economic status. The answers were given by the head of family (male) on behalf of their wife/daughter in their presence. All the women 100% (n=83) revealed that their life style has been changed after the rehabilitation; 57.8% (n=48) declared that they

had lost their traditional livelihood work such as livestock-buffalo ranching, tree lopping etc.). Regarding occupation, 74.6% (n=62) responded that they had started learning to make handicraft items with the help of different NGOs (swings, knitting etc.), while 4.8% (n=4) were working with schools on contract basis and another 20.4% (n=17) were engaged in household related work.

Regarding NGO input, 55.4% (n=46) were in favour of the various organisations working there, whereas 44.5% (n=37) did not answer the question. However, 100% (n=83) of the women wanted additional facilities and infrastructure for every household such as improvements to the road network, school education, medicare, veterinary care and sanitation besides. Only few wanted government employment for their educated children.

Further resettlement: It is considered that there is a need to re-settle interested families away from areas adjoining RNP to minimize man-elephant conflict, especially in migratory corridors. Therefore state forest department is continuing to make the effort to re-settle Gujjars from both the park area and its margins.

Discussion: Rajaji National Park, Haridwar and Lansdowne forest division are in the same geological area and wildlife use the whole forest all the year for water, feeding and seasonal migration. Out of nine forest ranges of Rajaji, seven are presently free from human activities. However, Gujjars still remain in two and do not want to move outside from the RNP area because there is a lack of fodder at the rehabilitation sites and they demand separate land for each family.

Relocation of tribal people from protected areas is controversial and issues regarding such relocations remain unresolved. The Indian government continues to relocate (often unwilling) villagers from protected areas in an attempt to enhance watershed management and biodiversity conservation. However, factors such as high human population density, widespread poverty and large number of livestock (and hence over-grazing) all have to be suitably addressed during such relocations.

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