

**BEING DISPLACED: LIVELIHOOD AND SETTLEMENT IN THE  
INDIAN SUNDARBANS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The role of environment in instigating population movements, is only gaining prominence in the present contexture of global warming and climate change. The aim of this thesis was to analyse how environment-induced displacement and its subsequent resettlement and rehabilitation is apprehended in India, taking natural hazards as the phenomenon in question. Based on a qualitative methodology and with Sagar Island of the Indian Sundarbans in West Bengal as the study area, the thesis examined the interlinked yet convoluted relationship between environment and humans in a natural hazard prone region. The thesis analysed the ways in which livelihood strategies, mainly undertaken at the household level are dynamically structured to cater to alterations in their immediate environment, presented by both sudden and slow-onset hazards and where they are threatened by displacement. However, the persistence and the existence of the households is uncertain, considering the short-term orientation of the coping measures, of which voluntary migration, ‘planned’ and ‘unplanned’ resettlement also play significant roles. Grounded on the overarching theoretical paradigm of the social construction of disaster, the thesis delved into its varied definitions and risks involved amongst stakeholders, where such perceptions were observed to be diverse and also conflicting with each other. Thus, apart from the local households, the thesis also addressed the role of government (‘first sector’) and non-government organizations (‘third sector’), within the milieu of ‘politics’ of disaster, risks and its responsibility and how in the absence of concrete legal framework or protective measures, do the environment-induced displaced (existing and probable) population envision their future status quo. The perception of risks varied and how they were constructed affected the household’s decision on whether to stay, leave (displaced or migrate) or even to resettle elsewhere. The household’s socio-economic position in the vulnerability spectrum is interlaced with the political activeness and/or passiveness of government and non-government organizations. Households engaging in ‘planned’ and ‘unplanned’ forms of resettlement, as one of the coping mechanisms in situations of disaster, rests on these constructions, thereby making displacement also socially constructed. However, the ‘impermanency’ of these coping strategies not culminating into ‘adaptive’ practices, is leading to situations of ‘trapped’ populations, a predicament considering the present context of climate change.