

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

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CLARE LIZAMIT SAMLING

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY
KOLKATA-700032
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Introduction

Humans from time immemorial have always been on the move. Erstwhile, the drivers for this mobility may have been for the accrual of food, protection against physical threats such as wild animals, external enemy groups, epidemics or even natural hazards. Contemporarily, the factors oscillate from the hankering for social and economic upliftment, to seeking refuge against political, religious or ethnic conflict and implementation of development projects. Natural hazards, though an age-old factor for population movements, is only now gaining recognition, primarily due to its considerably debated association with the phenomena of global warming and climate change. These population movements are effectuated by an amalgamation of push and pull factors working alongside, in both the sending (outgoing) and receiving (incoming) areas. It involves people moving from one place to another, either voluntarily or involuntarily, a question of employing or denial of one's own 'choice'. It would be an ideal scenario to rigidly compartmentalize the varied push and pull factors of population movements, as well as the typology in terms of forced and voluntary, but in reality, such well-defined distinction is rather complex.

This thesis is circumscribed to the Indian Sundarbans delta, notably the island of Sagar or also known as Sagardwip or Gangasagar. The Indian Sundarbans, particularly the study area of Sagar Island presents a 'contested space' between environment and humans. WWF-India, (2009) opined that the total number of 102 inhabited islands of the Indian Sundarbans have condensed to 98 islands because 04 islands have been submerged, with about 6000 families displaced (WWF-India, 2009). The question that is broached through this research is - how then do the people constantly negotiate and re-negotiate their existence in this contested space? By contested space here, the researcher means a perpetual state of conflict between man and the environment, in this precarious region of the Indian Sundarbans. How does disaster, displacement and the risks involved form a part of this negotiation? This subject of nature-society conflict or interaction has been of much dissension in environmental sociological discourses. As such, this thesis endeavours to contend from a 'New environmental paradigm (NEP) and demurs the age-old 'Human exemptionalism/exceptionalism paradigm' (HEP), that comprehended society as isolated from nature or dominant over it (Catton & Dunlap, 1978; Hannigan, 1995). Not being oblivious of the beneficial relationship between the natural resources and human beings, it is rather the conflictual interaction between man and the environment that would be the pivot of this thesis; the imbalance in the socio-ecological interrelationship between the two forces. Further, the disaster that is dealt in this thesis may be

a result of natural forces but the scenario that unfolds has major social underpinnings. As such, this research endeavours to delve into the following three overarching research questions.

- What are the livelihood strategies and risks people constantly construct and negotiate in a natural hazard pre-disposed region, living under the threat of environmental displacement? How does the dynamics of displacement and voluntary migration feature in this context?
- What significance does these constructions and negotiations have on the resettlement and rehabilitation outcomes, whether ‘planned’ or ‘unplanned’? What works and what does not when the total structure of these dismantled transitioning societies, tend to reassemble within new environments?
- Does the conceptualization of natural disaster and the perception of risks of displacement and resettlement involved, align between the local people, government and non-governmental organizations, within a social context?

Based on the overarching paradigm of the social constructions of disaster, what are the strategies that the people adopt in order to administer the situation? How do the people under the threat of likely environment-induced displacement, perceive their uncertain existence and calculate and define their risks? The changing environment enforces a change in livelihood options, where it is now being structured to cater to such transformations and make their stay in the region viable. How does displacement and resettlement feature in these dynamics? In analysing such strategies and risks, the interrelatedness between displacement and (voluntary) migration would also be assessed. It has been observed that in the lived experiences of disaster-affected populace, forced displacements and (voluntary) migrations are not so easily separated but are complex decisions made by individuals or households and overall communities in response to economic and social pressures, deteriorating infrastructure and discourses of risk, based on their differential positions in the vulnerability spectrum. The perception of risks is varied and how they are constructed will affect the household’s decision whether to stay, leave (displaced or migrate) or even to resettle elsewhere. When undertaking this decision, what bearing does it have on the household’s resettlement outcomes? As such, the study examines the interlinked yet convoluted relationship between environmental vagaries, life and livelihood risks and the phenomenon of displacement and subsequent resettlement, planned or otherwise.

Keeping the ‘old resettlers’ as an instance of a ‘planned resettlement’ process, the researcher is interested to understand the dynamics of the people in the existing circumstances and those

who take matters in their own hands. The Indian Sundarbans, in particularly the island of Sagar, posits a study area where such phenomenon can be witnessed. This thesis therefore explores the narratives of disaster and the dynamics of environment-induced displacement, from three vantage points – (i) historicity of the oustees who underwent ‘planned resettlement’ initiated by the state; (ii) ‘unplanned’ or ‘self-resettlers’ – those who are undertaking the resettlement process themselves and where the continuum of displacement and voluntary migration would be analysed (iii) ‘trapped’ population- those who are unable to relocate themselves for varied reasons. The role of the government and non-government organizations in this context have also be addressed in this study. In the absence of concrete legal framework or protective measures, how do these environment-induced displaced (existing and probable) population envision their future status quo? In the attempt to understand risk definitions and responsibility of varied stakeholders, the thesis delves into the question of the ‘politics’ of risks and the onus of responsibility, where the interventions and the lack thereof can be assessed. It has been observed in few literatures germane to resettlement that the coping mechanisms of community-based resettlement, enabled the oustees to rebuild their livelihood more successfully, as they could adapt much better. Finding such mechanisms in the study area would further add another dimension to the study.

Administratively, Sagar Island is known as a Sagar Community Development Block (CDB) under Kakdwip sub-division, South 24 Parganas district¹. The reason for selecting this island is that it has a history of ‘planned’ resettlement of people, initiated during the late 1960’s, by the local government (Panchayat) of West Bengal, due to displacement caused by erosion and submergence of certain islands and village of ISD. However, post the period of planned resettlement, the perpetual slow onset disaster interspersed with sudden-onset hazards, leading to subsequent loss of land, have continued to generate displaced population in the selected regions. The purpose of this research is descriptive in nature and the study would adopt a qualitative methodology for empirical understanding of the research problem. The thesis further orients to transform from a descriptive to a prescriptive study. The researcher through the insights gained from this study hopes to contribute towards policy formulation for

¹ The Indian Sundarbans is administratively divided into two districts- North and South 24 Parganas. The Indian Sundarbans had been proposed to be transformed into a district by the Chief Minister, West Bengal in 2015-2016, but the plan has still not come into execution. In this study, Sagar Island would be assessed as a part of the South 24 Parganas only.

sustainable resettlement and rehabilitation, pertaining to environment-induced displacement, which is the need of the hour in the era of global warming and climate change.

Methodological framework

This research espouses a constructivist (also referred to as interpretivist) paradigm or worldview. This epistemological framework takes into its milieu the subjective imports of the respondent's experiences towards a phenomenon, which can be diverse. The task of the researcher then is to seek the intricacies in these perspectives that have been developed through the construction and negotiation with others in a social and historical context (Creswell, 2013, p.24-25). The research design that structures this thesis is Qualitative. This type of research involves studying things within their natural settings. It attempts to construe phenomena and what meanings evolve out of it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3). Therefore, in this process multiple realities are generated.

In correspondence to the research questions, the study aims to fulfil the following objectives:

- To find out the livelihood strategies and responses of the households living under the threat of environmental/natural hazards.
- To understand the process of displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation of 'planned' resettlers.
- To analyse the emerging trends of resettlement and reestablishment practices of recently displaced households.
- To assess the role of the government and the non-government organizations in these dynamics.

Discussion & conclusion

On 26th May 2021, the 'very severe cyclonic storm' Yaas around 9 am (IST), made landfall at the south of Balasore, Odisha, with a wind speed of 130-140 kmph². The cyclone accompanied by storm, high tides and torrential rainfall, flooded the coastal regions of West Bengal, including South 24 Parganas and Sagar Island. The situation report of UNICEF (28th May, 2021), estimated a total of 10 million affected people, located in 4619 villages of West Bengal. Till today, the scale of overall devastation is yet to be fathomed. Relief and other services could

² Kilometre per hour

not be delivered to Sagar Island instantly, as the only mode of traversing the island from the mainland is through the river Muriganga which was impossible to cross.

According to a prominent public policy think tank based in India³, in between 1970-2019, West Bengal has witnessed a five-fold surge in cyclones and seven times higher severe flood events (CEEW, 2021). The region was yet to recover from the devastating impact of Cyclone Aila of 2009, when the recent occurrences of Cyclone Amphan in 2020 and aforementioned Yaas in 2021, inflicted mayhem in the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. There is no doubt that incidences of sudden-onset hazards like a cyclone, causes massive destruction and even mortality. But fixating only on those section, would mean to overlook the other half of the population that continue to live in circumstances, where slow-onset hazards like erosion form a part of their everyday existence. The population of the Indian Sundarbans Delta (ISD) is growing significantly, due to a combination of natural growth and migration. However, the overall land area has been steadily decreasing. Since 1969, there has been a loss of 210 km² and the beginning of 2001, shows a net loss of 44 sq. km (Danda, et al., 2011, p. 4).

This research was undertaken to understand the symbiotic yet dialectical relationship shared between humans and their immediate environment (nature), negotiated within the backdrop of natural hazards. The research questions that this thesis hoped to answer were – (i) what are the livelihood strategies and risks people continually construct and negotiate in a natural hazard pre-disposed region, living under the threat of environmental displacement? How does the dynamics of displacement and voluntary migration feature in this context? (ii) What significance does these constructions and negotiations have on the resettlement and rehabilitation outcomes, whether ‘planned’ or ‘unplanned’? What works and what does not when the total structure of these dismantled transitioning societies, tend to reassemble within new environments? (iii) Does the conceptualization of natural disaster and the perception of risks of displacement and resettlement involved, align between the local people, government and non-governmental organizations, within a social context? The study area selected to contextualise the research problem was Sagar Island, administratively a Community Development Block and a part of the Indian Sundarbans or Indian Sundarbans Delta (ISD).

The human settlements in the study area of Sagar Island as well as in the larger Indian Sundarbans, has been geographically and historically shaped by the ingress and egress of various powers. The spatial, socio-political development and functioning of this region went

³ Council on Energy, Environment & Water (CEEW)

concurrently with the environmental changes and calamities. Numerous methodology and methods were applied to ‘tame’ this wilderness, mainly through agricultural expansion. The ambitious plans of the colonisers were time and again disenchanted by natural hazards. However, what resulted was not just a geographical re-shaping, but also emergence of a complex system of agrarian relations. By the time, the British left India, the agrarian relations in this deltaic region had become far too chaotic. There has been a debate amongst scholars, that the post-independent period mirrors an over-prioritisation of conservation of the ecosystem, over human development, evident by the dearth of amenities in the inhabited islands of the region.

Based on the above research questions, objectives were delineated and this concluding chapter attempts to synthesise both of them together. The first objective of the study was to *find out the livelihood strategies and responses of the households living under the threat of environmental/natural hazards*. In the study area, livelihood decision-making and strategies for endurance against hazards, is deliberated at the household level. Analysis of livelihood can be an effective method for understanding the varied components of vulnerability of people. During a disaster, a household’s vulnerability can be assessed by their accessibility to, and capability of successfully applying the means of safeguarding themselves. Therefore, the livelihood activity that a household undertakes and how they cope with its fluctuations, in a natural-hazard prone environment, reflects where the household is located in the spatial and socio-economic vulnerability spectrum. The repercussions that a natural hazard has on the livelihoods of people is, one of the central criteria for it to manifest into a disaster. It is impractical to ascertain a particular social characteristic as an inherent factor in the construction of vulnerability to environmental hazards. Vulnerability here develops through the intersectionality of aspects.

Throughout the inhabited islands of the region, there is an inconsistency in the socio-economic characteristics of its inhabitants. A household’s monthly income is quite difficult to ascertain owing to the instability of espoused livelihood activities. These differences become more pronounced during the occurrences of disasters. While considering the strategies for livelihood subsistence, the household has to deal with not just external threats of hazard, but their own internal societal dynamics as well. The primary livelihood of the (respondent) household in the study area, is agriculture, where they belonged to marginal, small, semi-medium farmers or landless labourer categories. The declining land holding of the settlers due to severe erosion, over the years, is also influencing their economic and social status. Households over time, have

switched from cultivating salt-tolerant rice varieties, primarily for consumption, to freshwater growing varieties and later to high yielding varieties (HYV), for market as well. Despite the high dependency on agriculture of the local economy, there are lesser number of irrigation channels, and no (artificial) irrigation facilities catering to Sagar Island (and even block). The landless households that rely on tenancy, sharecropping or agricultural labourer, prefer to cultivate paddy rather than other crops, because of the minimum risks attached to it. There is an increasing trend towards diversification of crops, for more commercial varieties like the cultivation of Pan (betel leaves). The production of betel leaves suffered a setback after the two consecutive cyclones in 2020 (Amphan) and 2021 (Yaas).

The deltaic island regions and especially the low-lying type like the Indian Sundarbans, elicits the risk of cyclones and tides, importing large quantity of water immediately and inundating the agricultural land. The breaching of embankments, also result in flooding of the cultivated land with saline water. The saline water imposes different levels of damage to the crops, being contingent on the duration of water stagnancy on the land as well as the time and amount of rainfall that would flush out the salt later. The process of flushing out the salt deposits is extremely slow. The absence of rainfall could result in additional crisis where the groundwater is either contaminated with salinity or not replenished with fresh water. Add to this, the degradation of land and erosion of soil. All these ensues in a decline of food security of the region. The researcher observed desertion of land by the original households and in few instances such land had been converted to aquaculture ponds for market consumption (often unlicensed).

Amongst the households, there was significantly a lesser percentage of population that were dependent on fishing as their primary livelihood activity. The practice being associated with landless small-scale fishermen - '*Matsajibis*' in the local parlance. This mode of living, is however embroiled in caste and religious prejudices, which has its roots in the pre-colonial and colonial era. The severity of hazards has necessitated the dismissal of caste and religious scruples to occupation. Some of the households while considering their options for survival, had turned from agricultural dependency to fishing. Comparatively fishing is a riskier livelihood strategy than agriculture but equally (or maybe even highly) remunerative. The transformation to the collection of prawns and its seedlings in the nearby *khals* or *nadi*, represents the last resort for any household. The major challenge in case of both agriculture as well as fishing presents itself in the form of poor transportation. The diminishing land size is resulting in a loss of common property resource (CPR), creating issues for those dependent on

them for livestock grazing. Thus, sustaining animals on a larger quantity has become difficult due to the dearth of grazing space. Within hazardous setting, the households that are vulnerable, recurrently needs to endure assorted setbacks to their lives, livelihoods and settlements. Livelihood vulnerability and risk is comparatively higher for the households in the periphery than in the centre, due to the relentless danger from both sudden and slow-onset hazards. Over the years, the value of land in the periphery has decreased and there is least likelihood of anyone voluntarily purchasing a land there, a state of affairs observed more after the recent cyclone Yaas. Any change in the environment is bound to affect the livelihood risks that households undertake.

All factors combined, the household's dependency on the State is much high. In the rural areas of ISD including Sagar, one of the most commonly availed schemes for employment, is the government funded Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/Scheme (MGNREGA). But this too is caught up with its own set of issues. Voluntary migration for work to areas outside the region or state, has now become one of the most important and burgeoning livelihood strategy of the households. The unpredictability of the setting, unavailability of adequate livelihood opportunities, combined with the non-deliverance of schemes like MGNREGA, 'pushes' the households to seek avenues outside of the study area. There is an assortment of work in which the migrants are engaged in, which is temporary or seasonal, depending on the availability of work and also on the social characteristics of the household – age, sex etc. It has been observed that in the aftermath of a natural hazard, like in the case of Yaas, there is an increase in the volume of migrants outside the original area of residence. A transformation from agricultural to non-agricultural practices or trend of de-agrarianisation/de-peasantisation is evident. Thus, each and every livelihood change be it in-situ or ex-situ, signifies risks in itself. The social construction of risks occurs at the household level, that incorporates its calculation and management. In the everyday life of a household, struggling with erosion, this construction exists in a dynamic state. Thus, the ecology of an environmental setting is bound to affect the overall dimensions of a society and vice versa. Time and again the livelihood sustainability of households are tested by the tenacious natural hazards in the Indian Sundarbans. The severity of hazards combined with equally unsustainable coping strategies, has increased the household's inability to withstand the pressure and ultimately turn towards more riskier measures.

This brings us to the second objective which was *to understand the process of displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation of 'planned' resettlers*. The ultimate challenge to the

households that the environment presents, is the threat of displacement. During 1975-1990, the Indian Sundarbans was a quarry to the highest rate of erosion, leading to the submergence of islands of the archipelago viz., Lohachara, Suparibhanga, Bedford, Kabasgadi, along with the villages of Khasimara, Khasimara Char, Lakshmi Narayanpur, Bagpara, Baishnabpara of Ghoramara. The smaller islets, once a part of the larger Sagar Island, entwined in active socio-cultural and economic interactions, separated and eventually vanished. These have been considered as 'old resettlers' in this study. Instances of 'new planned' resettlement have also been focused. The reason why this category has been termed as 'new planned' is because the resettlement was fairly recent in between the period of 2010-2021. By the time the households were displaced, those who claimed had bigger landholdings, had become small, marginal and landless farmers, facing downward mobility of their status and living on inland roads and were barely surviving.

The basic elements in the resettlement and rehabilitation package consisted of land-for-land and housing. However, there were no parity in the distribution of the packages, within the old resettlers itself as well as between the old and new resettlers, as detailed in Chapter 5. In both the cases, the process was led by the political parties in power, through the local government - panchayat. The party in power may have changed hands, but the internal workings of the programme remained more or less the same. The 'planned' nature of resettlement in both the cases, unveils rather a failure of planning. Apart from the initial discussion of the choice of resettled land, the resettlers had no other role in the decision-making of their own resettlement process. The size of the land holding depended on vacant vested land and most of the land are located in vulnerable peripheral areas, which is closer to the embankment, river or *khal*. The infrastructural provided in the both cases of relocation were neglected, inadequate and also creating pressure on the existing ones, on which even the host-population depended upon. As no livelihood opportunities were granted in the resettlement package, the resettlers took a longer time to recuperate. The manifold missing elements in this resettlement did not allow the process to be rehabilitative. Hence, in this case, displacement was acknowledged by the state (although through the party in power) and therefore actions for planned resettlement were undertaken. The struggles that they had to endure to make the place habitable, generate livelihood, were the risks that they thought were necessary for their existence in their new location.

The third objective of this study, was *to analyse the emerging trends of resettlement and reestablishment practices of recently displaced households*. This objective takes into

consideration the ‘unplanned’ forms of resettlement strategies and risks undertaken by the households. The account of ‘self-resettlers’ that has been captured in this research, all occurred within a recent time frame (from 2003 onwards). As it is obvious, these were resettlers who had to undertake the entire resettlement process on their own, without any government or non-government help. There is a merging of slow and sudden-onset hazards, that were influential factors for forcing households to move. The trend takes place across both intra and inter-island. All possible in-situ coping strategies are applied prior to taking the decision to resettle themselves.

Two main factors were identified that acted as the impetus for households to undertake the choice of self-resettlement, which either worked separately or in unison. The households when faced with the question of displacement, relied on their *social capital* (as conceptualised by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu) for eliciting in this risk of self-resettlement. This social capital was in the form of consanguineous and affinal kin relations who were either residents or prior-residents in the destination area. When the households were displaced, their social networks had given them refuge, in the form of small size of land and a pre-constructed house. The social capital also became an important mechanism that allowed the self-resettlers to adjust and navigate their lives in the new environment.

The other factor was voluntary migration of members of household, outside of the study area, either within the state or outside. The nature of migration is temporary, with relatively higher proportion of male migrants. In the ever-transitioning disaster-prone area, the struggle for existence is made possible by the remittances of the migrants that sustains the households, providing greater resilience and solidity. Resettlement is made possible through the remunerations that the migrants send back home. This maybe utilised for purchasing land from their social network, renovation work of the new resettled house etc. Although, the migration of the members of the households does ensure financial support, but it occurs at the cost of the mistreatment and deplorable living conditions of the migrants at the receiving area, with no legal protective measures. This out-migration of men is also generating a situation of ‘left-behind wives’ or women (in case of unmarried men and their mothers), who are now burdened with the dual responsibility of managing the inside-household chores as well as outside-work. Those left-behind then experience disaster on an everyday basis. Thus, in the context of slow-onset disasters, there is a blurring of the boundaries between voluntary migration and displacement. Distinguishing between migration and displacement maybe ideal for policy

formulation, but pinpointing one as a cause or consequence is rather impossible as well as impractical.

As for all the old and new resettlers, their residences might have altered, but their problems endured. The irony of the resettlement status quo is that, Sagar Island itself is facing severe coastal erosion and land loss. There is a state-induced 'impermanency' in their resettlement, reflected in the denial of the grant of *pattas* or legal titles of the resettled land to many of the households. The state can usurp power to acquire the land or even forcefully evict the households. The ability to only partially change the address in their legal documents, has proved to be disconcerting because of their inability to access government schemes, for all new planned and unplanned households. The address of their voter card is often the first document to be corrected which was believed to be necessary for seeking favours from parties in the new resettled area. In the case of inter-island resettlement, the connections between the two islands remained. This were either in the form of legal networks or utilisation of infrastructural facilities or also social, economic and cultural relations. Household along with family has become fragmented or diminished in size due to the resettlement process itself, as acquiring such a larger space for relocation of the entire household/family was uncertain. The other main cause of diminishing household size was, the migration of its members to other states for work. In certain scenarios, a phenomenon of multi-spatial extended household is also developing.

On the other hand, there is a spatial-induced impermanency, as all planned resettlement colonies are situated in the periphery of the island. In addition, more than half of the self-resettlers have resettled themselves in both old and new planned colonies. The situation of all the resettlers can be best explained through the idiom 'from the frying pan to the fire'. A difference in taking risks can be observed due to pre-existing inequalities in socio-economic resources. The people perceive that the households belonging to higher income category or social position were able to relocate themselves, in the interiors of the island or to neighbouring peri-urban areas of Kolkata or even East Medinipur. Furthermore, those at the lower rung of the ladder, moved either nearby to their earlier place of residence, but not very far from the place of disaster. These available areas then all tend to be in the periphery of the island. The notion and experience of disaster for the ones in the interior is starkly different from the ones residing in the periphery. For those belonging to the lower economic category, despite having high level of risk discernment, they are inhibited by their deficiency of alternative choices for risk-mitigating actions. In the current contexts, the threat of changing climate, regular occurrences of natural hazards and the household's lack of resources to combat with them, are

pertinent issues. Sustainable embankment construction or repair was highlighted as the need of the hour. Few have left it on fate and believes that strategies would be developed as when the situation arises. For others, the responsibility should be of the state, if instances of re-displacement do occur.

The question then arises – do the people when left endangered to risks of disasters, consider resettlement as one of the viable coping strategy or as the last recourse? The answer to this question maybe both. The households while strategising and executing all available coping strategies for livelihood maintenance in order to subsist, considers resettlement as one. All coping mechanisms comes with its assorted risks. This risk perception, calculation and often even management has to be carried out at the household level. Resettlement (in any form) would be the last option that the household may deliberate upon when threatened by displacement, but comes with its own set of risks. Both planned and unplanned resettlement here in the study area, exists in a never-ending cycle. As evident in this study, whatever resettlement options that the households undertake, does not guarantee them long-term resilience or sustainability. New resettlement areas itself are spaces of human-nature conflict where the latter here appears to have an ascendancy over the former. With the continuous threat to livelihood even in the resettled area, in addition to lack of policy support and with no concrete solutions at hand, the households once again enter into this edacious and never-ending cycle of looking for new means of coping.

What is occurring is a state of ‘trapped households’ in four interconnected dimensions - physical, economic, social and political⁴. An observation can also be made here that even within the notion of trapped households, due to the differential socio-economic characteristics, there exists certain members of the household who are far more vulnerable than the others. For instance, women, physically challenged, elderly, children, that reveals a difference in inter-household and intra-household construction of disaster. Notable instances have also occurred where a household voluntary engages in ‘entrapment’. Households for whom fishing is their primary livelihood, reside temporarily nearby periphery areas and return to their original residences once the season is over. Few households utilise ‘dual’ residentialship as a strategy to derive benefits of government and non-government schemes or programmes from being residents of both the islands. A special mention should be made of the island of Ghoramara,

⁴ Described in more detail in chapter 6.

which can be considered as existing in a state of neglect and entrapment, ever since been declared as a ‘No man’s land’ in the 1970’s.

The final objective was *to assess the role of the government and the non-government organizations in these dynamics*. The main aim of this objective was to understand on whom does the responsibility of disaster, displacement and resettlement rests upon. In the social construction of disaster, apart from the local households, the government (‘first sector’) and non-government organizations (‘third sector’), are important stakeholders. Livelihood and disaster risks are deliberated and experienced by the household at the local and everyday level, but their management somehow demands public responsibility at the governmental level. What the State defines as disaster contrasts to how the local people as well as the non-government organizations perceive it. As such, what spells out as disaster is also politically motivated.

Analysing the relevant Disaster Management Acts, Plans and Policies of the central, state and district level, it was noted that there is a prioritisation of sudden-onset hazards like cyclone, floods over erosion. The dearth of erosion vulnerable areas in the multi-hazard maps of the WBDMP and the state DM policy, is an indication of such neglect. Although restoration of homes has been mentioned, but it is not clear as to what are the methodology and methods of turning this into reality. The LARR Act of 2013⁵ includes a clause on residential projects for households in hazard-prone locations but does not explain the execution of it further. West Bengal has still not amended its land acquisition act along the lines of the LARR act. The island of Sagar represents a contrasting ecological space, where there is an over-emphasis of promotion and development of the island as a pilgrim-tourist hotspot, over its role in being a refuge for people even living in other neighbouring islands, who are susceptible to disasters. But “*Even the gods aren’t safe in Sagar Island*” reiterated a headline of newspaper daily, hinting at the susceptibility of the Kapil Muni temple to erosion and cyclone, that attracts millions of pilgrim-tourists in the island (Ganguly, 2021). Nevertheless, the state government intends to forward their proposal of attaining the UNESCO World Heritage tag for the Gangasagar Mela. Government schemes like MGNREGA and PMA-Y are itself embroiled in corruption and bureaucratic hassle, at the central, state and local level.

NGOs in the study area, act as mediators between the government and local populace at large. None of the NGOs were directly involved in the planned resettlement process. These NGOs do

⁵ Right to fair compensation and transparency in land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement Act or LARR in short

not have specific programs on displacement or for that matter resettlement. However, the NGOs from time to time do engage with the resettled households in various projects that the organizations implement. But these households are not the specific target of their beneficiaries, it is rather the villagers at large. During the events of Cyclone Amphan (2020) and Yaas (2021), both the government and NGOs have taken responsibility and concerted efforts in every phase of the two disasters; starting from early warning, evacuation, to relief and even compensation in the post-hazard phase. But in the long run, conflicts do emerge in the functioning of the government and NGOs, within the same space. The government's strike on the operations of NGOs have affected their funds, which has curtailed their functioning over the years. Unlike the other causes of displacement, the NGOs in the case of environment-induced displacement takes lesser initiative in the consolidation of the masses for political action or developing 'agency'.

The construction and re-construction of embankments is embroiled in politics itself, between the stakeholders. The decrepit state of the life-line of the people of the Indian Sundarbans, discloses the negligence of the state. The embankments reconstruction transpires on a reactive emergency response rather than proactive initiative. Although the nature of erosion itself makes it unable for the government to develop warning mechanisms. However, even when such hazard strikes, they do not arouse scenarios of relief and rehabilitative measures. The rapidity in which both the government and non-government responds to situations of sudden-onset hazards like cyclone is contrasting as compared to situations of erosion (slow-onset). The pertinent question here then is what should be the degree of impact of a slow-onset disaster in order for it to be avowed as an emergency or a disaster?

The social construction of disaster and the risks involved is a lengthier process and continues even in the post-disaster period. Thus, in this sense displacement and subsequent resettlement and rehabilitation process is also socially constructed. The definition of disaster by the state influences the way in which displacement is perceived. The decision of any state intervention is on the acknowledgment of displacement itself, with disaster as the cause. Even the line of difference between migration and displacement exists in, how the state visualizes such a movement. Analysing the scenario at the international and national context, the declaration of a movement of population as 'displacement' invokes speedy and greater amount of response from the government, in comparison to it being defined as 'migration'. The continual self-relocation of people is not viewed as displacement by the state, which as mentioned, would have entailed a more rapid response by the government. Even multiple-displacement that the

households at the periphery engage in as they retreat inland, do not count. The dearth of a definition is leading to a lack of recognition, which then further leads to an inaccuracy in the assessment of people actually displaced and resettled. This results in the deficiency of effective decision making.

Defining or even acknowledging disaster-induced displacement by the state is essential for households to perceive their own definition and perception of risks of resettlement and rehabilitation. Here, too the ideologies and decision-making of the respective stakeholders are then disarrayed. Livelihood, risks and disasters even though managed at the household level, is affected by the action or inaction of government as well as non-government actors and are usually miscalculated. It can be observed that many local political conditions come into play that hinders delivery of the resettlement outcome. This relation between politics and resettlement works in two ways. In the case of old planned resettlers, those who showed inclination towards the local party in power, received benefits of larger land or a steady income job. As for the new planned resettlers, all the respondents utilized the assistance of the party in power for resettlement. There exists a mutual obligation between planned resettlers and political parties. The commitment towards resettlement is reciprocated with the casting of votes in the party's favour. This relationship continues before and even after the resettlement process.

On the other hand, conversations on matters of preventive resettlement coincides with election periods. The resettlement actions are rather reflections of 'proactive inaction' of those in power at the local or state level. This lack of initiative of resettlement on the part of the state or local government resides in the fear of losing out on their vote-bank. Vote-bank politics creates situations of entrapment. There exists a misalignment of risks perceived by the household and those calculated by the government or state. As such, the government has a problem with the ordering of their priorities. For the household, the decision on risks was not static and changed with the availability of experiences and choices. As for the state, the decisions are guided by their political agenda and where the execution is just temporary. The NGOs on the other hand, despite the necessity and the recognising the detrimental impact on the present and future generations of settlers, yet appear to be partially active in this construction. Therefore, the risks of undertaking planned, unplanned resettlement or remaining in their location is therefore reliant on these social constructions.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007), attributes anthropogenic influences as the basis of the phenomena of global warming and climate change. These exposes

the natural environment, human societies and their settlement to varied risks. Miscellaneous responses are bound to develop from local, state, national and international level, ranging from callousness to advocacy (Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 197). The reports predict detrimental consequences for livelihood of ‘vulnerable’ population anticipated to undermine food security and continual provision of resources. Experiences of households diverge due to the social features that mould ‘vulnerability’ and coping capabilities (Tompkins et al., 2021, p. 204). The unequal non-climatic features of societies interact with the climatic elements, thereby increasing household’s ‘exposure’ and ‘vulnerability’. Decisions on risks towards livelihood are then assessed based on these factors.

Climate change is expected to usher in newer challenges, especially for the households that are the direct recipients of these impacts, who would then have to calculate newer risks and appropriate strategies. Thus, it becomes obvious that people who are marginalized, be it socially, economically, culturally, politically or institutionally are more susceptible or vulnerable to climate change. Apart from the multitudinous impacts, climate change is expected to affect the movement of people, in diverse ways. But the interconnectedness between climatic and non-climatic factors, makes it tremendously problematic to establish a direct relationship between climate change and migration and/or displacement. UNICEF declared India as the 7th ‘most affected country due to climate change’, that resulted in life-threatening hazards, killing 2,267 people and leading to an economic loss equivalent to \$ 66,182 million⁶. The organization further stated that, “*17 out of 20 people in India is vulnerable to extreme hydrological and meteorological disasters like flood, drought and cyclone*” (UNICEF, 2021). Adamo (2009) and Warner and Afifi (2014) reiterate that the households in numerous South Asian countries including India, are at risk of being dispossessed due to climatic deviations and its subsequent livelihood set-backs (Haldar et al., 2021).

The situation for Sundarbans appears grim. Coastal and deltaic regions are extremely fertile with higher cultivable potential, enticing settlements and making the areas dense. The Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) delta is one of the most densely populated in the world (Reker, 2006, p. 21). The high density leads to greater human intercessions, therefore creating pressures on the ecosystem. But the deltas being low-lying are susceptible to hazards (Reker, 2006, p. 22). Deltas are supposedly ‘sensitive to climate change’ (Reker et al., 2006, p. 17) and highly vulnerable (Tompkins et al., 2021, p. 203). This exemplifies the dialectics of the region.

⁶ Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/climate-change> (01.01.2023; 8:30PM)

According to Hazra et al. (2002), the surface air temperature over the Bay of Bengal is increasing at a rate of 0.019°C per year. It is projected that by the year 2050, the temperature in the deltaic region will increase by 1°C (Hazra et al., 2002, p.10). The average rate of sea level rise of the Sundarbans at 3.14 mm per year, is higher than the global average of 2 mm per year. Nandi and Bandyopadhyay (2008), in their assessment of the 'Permanent Service for Mean Sea Level (PSMSL)' for the last 50 years data reveal rising sea level between +0.76mm/year and +5.22 mm/year at varied settings in the ISD. Between 2002-2009, the Relative Mean Sea Level (RMSL) was about 12mm per year (Hazra, 2010). The island is also simultaneously sinking at 1.5 to 2-4 mm per year (Reker et al., 2006, p.76; Danda et al., 2011, p. 27). In the same aforementioned study by the School of Oceanography, Jadavpur University, identified the North-East, South-East and South-West of the Sagar Island, as areas with a higher correlation between rising sea level and erosion (Hazra et al., 2002, p. 11). Rahman et al. (2020), discloses a 'strong vulnerability gradient' throughout the GBM Delta in both the countries of India and Bangladesh (p.38). The study addresses alterations in social vulnerability between 2001-2011, which observed both increase and decrease in the phenomena (Rahman et al., 2020, p. 38-39).

The Indian Sundarbans Delta (ISD) is designated as one of the most vulnerable regions in the era of Climate Change and labelled as a 'Climate change hotspot' (Ghosh et al., 2018). In 2008, India came forth with its National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), amended in 2014, while the West Bengal State Action Plan on Climate Change (WBSAPCC) was published in 2013. Unlike the NAPCC, which chose to remain silent on the issue of population movements due to climate change, the WBSAPCC, considers 'population displacement' and migration as consequences of extreme events. Sundarbans has been specifically focused as a vulnerable region in West Bengal. However, the plan lacks concrete provisions for dealing with population movements within Sundarbans and even within or outside of the state. Bearing in mind the vulnerability of coastal zones to climate change and restricting developmental works, the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) was notified in 1991. The entire ISD falls under various categories distinguished in the CRZ. The Category of CRZ I caters to forested areas, sand dunes, land within 100 m of a tidal creek, unpopulated islands and Sagar Island. The remaining areas of ISD, falls under CRZ III. West Bengal was a pioneering state to acquiesce its Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP) in 1997 (Danda et al., 2011, p.24). Currently, the state is also a part of the World Bank funded Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project (ICZMP⁷) that

⁷ The ICZMP was started on a pilot basis in three states of India namely Odisha, West Bengal and Gujarat.

included programs in Sagar for livelihood development, ecotourism, household electrification, construction of multipurpose cyclone shelters.

But the world is entangled in manifold debates that often turns out to be political. Conflicts that arise out of indifference, denial or negligence on the part of multiple stakeholders. The start of this debate emerges out of whether climate change is a myth or not. The consequences being multi-dimensional further complicates this issue. Add to this, the conflicts at the global level, surfaces between developed and developing nations and who should be responsible for the crisis. The dynamics forces of human mobility and climate change continues to be a much-debated topic. The sudden and slow-onset disasters are believed to induce a complex nexus of voluntary migration and displacement. Even the basic terminology for designating people undertaking such movements are numerous and entangled in dispute– ‘environmental refugees’, ‘ecological refugees’, ‘environmentally-displaced’ or ‘environmental-migrants’. The ramification of this leads to complication in the identification of vulnerable populations, the discrepancy in quantity of such movement and even seeking long-term solutions at the local, national and global level.

In 2007, Mr. Das⁸, now aged 87, originally from the vanished island of Lohachara, was escorted to New Delhi by the Green Peace organization. There, at the august conference, he was requested to share a testament of his story of displacement and ‘planned’ resettlement. He had since been resettled in a Colony in Sagar Island in 1982. His story was shared as a living example of the impending doom that the world would have to face in the forthcoming years. Global warming and climate change has been the two protagonists of that dreary future. A debate has emerged in the race for who should be considered as the first ‘Climate Refugees’ – the people from the submerged islands and villages of the Indian Sundarbans or the population from Tuvalu in Papua New Guinea?

In the present era of ‘neo-liberal governance’, besides state and non-state organizations, there can be several other ‘actors’ who take part or can contribute to the social construction of disaster and risks involved. Media in any form, can be one such body. The media outlook on the subject matter can be an interesting take on the study. During the course of this research, several newspaper clippings and social media pages had to be referred to, which revealed their significance to the social constructions of environmental disaster. The relationship between media and risks in modern society is a burgeoning topic of study. Due to the paucity of time

⁸ Name changed

and also the likelihood of the thesis being knotted within numerous dimensions being undertaken in the study, the researcher had to refrain the inclusion of such a position in this study. This is something which the researcher would like to pursue in the future. Another party to this social construction, would be the academic institutions. During the course of this study, the researcher had to engage in discussions with academics who have worked extensively in the Indian Sundarbans. The researcher could observe variations in the perspectives of various academicians and at the same time, conflictual. This was also something that could not be studied extensively at the present moment, but could definitely be pursued.

As is already known, the Sundarbans is shared between the two nations of India and Bangladesh. The study area of this thesis is limited only to a certain section of the Indian Sundarbans Delta and does not deal with its immediate neighbour-Bangladesh. As a greater portion of the Sundarbans falls under the administration of Bangladesh, a comparative study between the two would certainly be interesting and valuable. This comparative study would also assist in policy decisions, equally relevant for both the nations. The problems of both the nations may be more or less the same and similar explanations can form a part of the dialogue between the two. Assuming the occurrence of massive population movements, transboundary resolutions may be required.

The beginning of 2020, ushered in the pandemic of Covid – 19. One of the major impacts was the return (often forceful) of millions of voluntary migrants to their original home. The migrants of the Indian Sundarbans were no doubt a part of this state-of-affairs. The irony of the situation was, that the people who were fleeing from their home because of the threat of natural hazards, were unprepared for the disaster that was unfolding before them in the receiving area. The researcher has in certain chapters touched upon the repercussion of Covid-19 on the households. Nonetheless, it was not feasible to pursue such an aspect towards the end of the thesis. This would be an interesting perspective to study in the future.

Gender differences in perception of disaster, was not a specific focus of this study. During the course of my field work, the researcher did come across households where women were the representatives in the interview. This was mostly due to the timing of the field work conducted. As a major part of the field work was mostly done during the first half of the day, the men of the household were out for work, while the women remained busy with their household chores. The other reason was also due to the lack of male representation as the women were 'left behind' as either their husband or son had migrated to urban areas for work. As stated above

the experience of disaster would then be different for the women and men (see chapter 6). This aspect is something which would be interesting to study in future.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the aim of the thesis was to suggest appropriate policy formulation to deal with the issue of environment-induced displacement. The following paragraphs details some of these suggestions.

Deconstructing disaster- the step towards actual and active decision making begins with the deconstruction of the meaning and definition of disaster itself. In the social construction of disaster, a difference occurs where there is an overt emphasis on the ‘technical’ and quantifiable aspects by the government, but for the people it is much more personal and qualitative. The ignorance of ‘displacement’ in the technical definitions, hinders the decision on resettlement and further rehabilitation. The possibility of environmental or natural hazards leading to population movements - displacement and migration, should be incorporated in the disaster management act, plans, policies at all levels of government. This can then provide scope for disaster management legal enactments to incorporate resettlement as a part of their schema. It is to be understood that sudden and slow-onset hazards in a region like the Indian Sundarbans, works in tandem with each other. The negligence of one over the other can be detrimental and make the locality vulnerable in the long run.

Prioritising embankments - the significance of embankments for the people of the Indian Sundarbans is known to all stakeholders. This importance is not just physical. Apart from its important role of protecting the inhabitants from the onslaught of sea or rivers, the embankments serve other beneficial purposes as well. The structure is utilised for drying cow dung cakes by the women to be turned into fuel later. After the harvesting of the paddy, the slabs serve as planes where the sheaths are left to dry. For the fishing households, the structure is utilised for drying fishes which can either be self-consumed, sold in the local market or used as chicken feed. The *shukto maach* (dried fish) is a delicacy for many Bengali households. Scientific innovations and technologies, no doubt have to be considered while constructing embankments. But equally valuable would be the participation of the local people.

Yet there exists a nonchalance amongst all stakeholders towards its protection and management. The measures extended towards it appears more of stop-gap practices rather than preventive. Reconstruction and strengthening of embankments should be the priority in every policy decision-making for the Indian Sundarbans. The guidelines of the Department of Irrigation and Waterways, recommended measures such as, brick block pitching or dry brick

pitching and bamboo porcupine cages. Government organizations, NGOs and academic institutions are experimenting with various techniques of securing sustainability of these structures. WWF-I and the School of Oceanography, Jadavpur University are currently engaged in a project on mangrove regeneration to curb erosion. The sustainability of this method is yet to be known. The representative of Muriganga Gram Panchayat during the interview mentioned the arrival of a foreign experts for embankment re-construction. So far nothing manifested out of it. Despite the importance, the household perceive embankment to be of state property and naturally its management should be the latter's responsibility. The Delta Vision document of WWF-I (2011), suggests the maintenance of embankments in the Indian Sundarbans, as Common Property Resource (CPR). This is believed to ensure effective management of all stakeholders involved.

Significance of traditional methods of coping – few traditional methods of coping have been elucidated in this thesis. For instance, the oral history of the households, revealed the practice of cultivation of traditional salt-tolerant varieties of rice. Practical assessment of such traditional methods of coping should be carried out, so as to consider policy mechanisms along those lines. Transforming these into 'adaptation' strategies, no doubt requires commitment to planning, execution and monitoring at all level, by all stakeholders. This thesis maintains a distinction between 'coping' and 'adaptation'. According to the Handbook on 'Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis' prepared by CARE (2009), coping strategies are more temporary and instantaneous in nature, aimed at survival. These are mere responses to pressures and may destroy resources with no substitutions. On the other hand, adaptation refers to long-term, continuous, sustainable, efficient, that integrates traditional and new innovative strategies and therefore producing alternatives (CARE, 2009, p.7). The 'adaptive capacity' of households and communities can only be achieved if they have 'access to' and 'control of' their multiple resources (CARE, 2009, p.5). The journey from coping to adaptation is undoubtedly strenuous and would require concerted efforts from all stakeholders concerned, at the local, national and global level.

Participatory development – in recent discourses on development, participatory approach has emerged as a new paradigm. According to Mathur (1997), "*without the commitment, creativity, energy and involvement of the people, the pace of development will not accelerate. The participatory approach is, in face being viewed as the most effective way of achieving equitable and sustainable development*" (p.53). It was seen that the local bodies like Panchayats had played an important role in the planned resettlement process. The functioning of MGNREGA

scheme requires participation of the panchayat, beginning with planning, execution and monitoring. Embankment reconstruction forms a part of this MGNREGA scheme. As such, projects should be planned in a participatory manner, emphasising on protecting the overall environment on which they are heavily dependent upon. Alternative livelihood opportunities need to be deliberated. These should not mere undertakings of temporary nature, but should take into account their ecology and their long-term sustainability.

As was evident in this thesis, the *role of NGOs* cannot be ignored in the social construction of disaster and displacement. Their role as mediators between local people and the government cannot be overlooked. Further, cases have been presented where *community-based organisations (CBOs)* like Self-Help Groups (SHGs) directly or indirectly play a significant role in the lives and livelihood of the people of the Indian Sundarbans. Almost all of the government and non-government schemes are channelised through the SHGs in the Indian Sundarbans. So far, the schemes and the reasons for the loans that are taken are more individual rather than as a group. The efficacy of SHGs can be more expanded if group activities are also prioritised. One of the advantages of SHG is its collectivity, that promotes group solidarity which can act as a protective force to combat collectively their common problem of natural hazard or overall climate change. The national, state and district level Disaster Management Act, plans and policies mandates integration of government and NGOs or CSOs. Indisputably, their cooperative contributions during cyclones are instantaneous. But in the post-disaster periods, conflicts do arise which directly impacts the households. As such, the groups, keeping aside their ideological differences need to work together on a common goal. Likewise, victims of erosion require equal attention and commitments from both the groups concerned. What is also then required is a *reorientation of political commitments*. For political parties in the Indian Sundarbans, a region where humans and nature share a symbiotic yet dialectical relation, environmental commitments should form a part of their ideologies and agendas. Embankments, resettlement, livelihood opportunities are incorporated in their assurances at the start of the election cycle, but once this cycle terminates, they are forgotten. NGOs, CBOs and political parties can act as promoters of ‘agency’ in local populace, to instil the spirit of environmental advocacy. Climate change would entail multi-dimensional impact, often unforeseen, which would require timely preparation, planning, implementation and monitoring. The immediate impacts and its coping solution are immediately experienced by the local households, but surviving it would require involvement of other decision-makers as well.

The ‘Sanremo Consultation’, organized en masse by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement and Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of International Migration with a theme⁹ dedicated to Planned Relocation in relation to climate change, in 2014, concludes that a well-planned relocation could be both a form of Disaster Risk Reduction and a form of Climate Change adaptation. Relocation should only be taken as a last resort, when all in-situ options have been tested, requiring the support of multiple actors like the funding agencies, international organizations, regional bodies, civil society, academic experts, concerned government authorities etc., and the need for guidance for such relocation to national and local authorities. Lessons can be learnt from resettlement and rehabilitation practices that have been carried out in other countries, be it as a precautionary measure or a post-disaster strategy¹⁰.

Acknowledging migration - as evident in this research, migration has now become a burgeoning livelihood strategy for the household. This strategy can transform from coping to adaptation, if its importance is not ignored. The remunerations of migrants can become important resources for households to strive for resilience during environmental crisis. Additionally, the ‘voluntary’ nature of migration may hinder policy formulation directed towards it. The insistence on distinguishing displacement and migration in the context of environmental disasters, would only lead to sluggishness in decision-making or its implementation. As observed in this study, within the setting of environmental hazards, the two appears in a continuum. Furthermore, despite the causes, displacement does receive some form of attention, even though it is limited in nature. Policies should be targeted towards safeguarding the interests of migrants in both the sending and receiving areas. For instance, methods like registration of migrants, migrant insurance, migrant group formation etc.

At the end, a question thus arises, can planned retreat be a possibility? In 2011, WWF-I published a report entitled Delta Vision. The debatable aspect of this vision was the proposal of a ‘phased out-migration’ of people from selected active parts of the archipelago to more ‘stable’ locations. The organization justifies the vision as a mid-way strategy to sustain this unique ecosystem as well its human inhabitants considering the vulnerability to climate change.

⁹ “Planned Relocation, Disasters and Climate Change: Consolidating Good Practices and Preparing for the Future”

¹⁰ Relocation of Vunidogoloa village in Fiji islands; resettlement of villages of Satabhaya Gram Panchayat in Odisha

As of today, there has been no initiation of implementation of the vision document on the part of the government but the organization considers it a positive step towards the opening up of a dialogue of such a nature. The first phase of the plan was to do away with the distinctive North and South 24 Parganas district and creation of one 'Biosphere district'. The proposal of Sundarbans as a district has been announced by the Chief Minister of the state in 2015, 2021 and even in November of 2022. But, according to the organization, their idea of a district was contrasting to that of the State, where the former had also written to the Chief Minister, stating the fallacy in the idea.

Social scientists cry in alarm, accusing it of being ludicrous and a strategy of prioritising conservation over people. A key informant of the State Department of Environment, Government of West Bengal feels that the decision to resettle or not should be wholly dependent on the individual which is evident from the following quote - *“Whether a person wants to stay in a place or relocate that should be his/her discretion. At least that is what I believe, unless and until there is some compelling factor, because you might be knowing about the small island people who says that we are not drowning we are fighting. What will you do? Will you go for a forced migration? Maybe they do move but their soul lives in that particular place, so it's not a very easy situation. The state government does have the onus of responsibility to find out that where they can have a better living but it has to be the decision of the person. He has to take the call, otherwise forced migration or migration under compulsion, I personally don't think it's a very good option for anyone. You are here today, but if it so happens that your country expels and you are here today, will that be same? They cannot be same.”*

On 5th of September, 2021, in a well-known newspaper daily, it was reported that about 30 families from Ghoramara island have been allotted 20 decimals of land each in Dakshin Haradhanpur, Sagar Island (Chaudhuri, 2021). The *pattas* for the same have been granted to the families by the Department of Land and Land Reforms, Government of West Bengal, prior to the resettlement. The primary cause of such relocation was stated to be natural disaster and the continuous havoc rendered by the simultaneous occurrence of cyclones – Amphan and Yaas. The construction of houses by the Department of Housing was still on the pipeline, but was stipulated to commence at the beginning of 2022. Besides land and pre-constructed houses, the relocation programme would also include infrastructural development and creation of livelihood options like provision of poultry, skill development, through inter-governmental

department enterprises (Chaudhuri, 2021). During the field work for this thesis, even in the beginning of 2022, the resettlement process had still not been initiated.

As for the household, a respondent remarked, “*Aar jaiga kothai? Shey rokom hole, tahole chole jete hobe. Bhagwan ja korbe, korbe.*” (“Where is the land? If it comes to that, then we would have to leave. God will do what he will do”).

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