



CEPA Paving the way to better resettlement policies

Through rigorous monitoring research and extensive stakeholder consultation, *The Centre for Poverty Analysis* (CEPA) facilitated an effective resettlement process for those affected by Sri Lanka's Southern Highway.

SETTING THE SCENE —In the late 1990s, Sri Lanka's efforts to generate economic growth led to intensive development of physical infrastructure. Roads, in particular, offered an opportunity for progress by connecting peripheral regions to the economic centre of Colombo, the capital city. As a result, Sri Lanka's first ever highway, known as the Colombo-Matara Highway or Southern Expressway, was started in 2006 to connect the capital with Matara, a major city in the south of the island. The rationale was that regional growth could be optimized by increasing the connectivity of the peripheral regions to the economic centre.

As the single largest road project ever implemented in Sri Lanka, the Southern Expressway was welcomed by the wider public and businesses engaged in sectors such as manufacturing and tourism. However, the process encountered many policy, legal and operational hiccups and was fraught with tension and opposing interests. In addition, construction of the highway displaced 1,300 families living on ancestral and traditional land along the route, many of whom also lost their landholdings in tea, rubber and cinnamon cultivations. Unsurprisingly, local communities had the least to gain and expressed strong concerns about the plans. The

implementer, Sri Lanka's Road Development Authority (RDA), was also faced with many unfamiliar social issues to manage.

WHAT CEPA DID —The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) is an independent non-profit organization promoting a better understanding of poverty-related development issues in Sri Lanka. CEPA was engaged by the Asian Development Bank in 2006 to assess the resettlement impacts of the expressway and feed this information back to the implementer, the RDA. While the project employed existing land acquisition law, which is quite archaic and offers minimal compensation to displaced families, it also incorporated principles from the country's 2001 *National Involuntary Resettlement Policy*. This policy protects the rights of displaced people, allowing for better compensation, resettlement arrangements and an enhanced space for consultation and participation. However, while it has been approved by cabinet, the policy is not yet legally binding. As this was the first displacement project for the RDA, with the potential to result in mistrust and misinformation, independent third party monitoring was necessary to assess and oversee the resettlement process.



CEPA carried out a structured monitoring process over four years, regularly sharing information with the RDA and other stakeholders. It surveyed 400 households, facilitated more than 30 group discussions with affected households, and interviewed more than 450 individuals, residents, farmers, engineers, donors, experts and local government officials. CEPA used a rigorous research method combined with an extensive field presence to generate credible evidence. Overall, its monitoring research became a trust-building exercise built on frequent and constant engagement with stakeholders.

Initial resistance changed to mutual trust and CEPA observed a major change in the attitudes and perceptions of bureaucrats and engineers, who began to hear the perspectives of those affected by the Southern Expressway. Towards the end of the monitoring process, there was greater interaction among the stakeholders and a culture of consultation, dialogue, and participation was cemented. CEPA therefore successfully bridged the communications gap between the affected parties and the implementers, which resulted in a better resettlement process within the project, while also sharing the evidence from its research with a broad array of stakeholders and the general public. In addition, CEPA formed new partnerships and

collaborations with advocacy groups that drew heavily on CEPA's research for their land campaigns throughout the process.

THE OUTCOME —CEPA's work provided the evidence required to support the new *National Involuntary Resettlement Policy*, as it demonstrated that this policy would provide better compensation, resettlement arrangements and enhanced participation opportunities to those affected. CEPA accomplished this through rigorous research, as outlined above, as well as outreach efforts including 27 national and local workshops, five presentations at forums, four print publications and extensive media coverage.

Due to the effective use of the *National Involuntary Resettlement Policy* throughout the project, 1,300 Sri Lankan families are now resettled into new areas and are working to rebuild their lives. The expressway is widely used and plans are underway to build a few more expressways. However, the policy is not legally binding and must be translated into law if it is to hold any traction in the future. CEPA is therefore now working to see this policy translated into a full-fledged law on land acquisition and resettlement, and hopes to make this policy applicable to infrastructure projects beyond the Southern Highway.

For more information on CEPA visit <http://www.cepa.lk>

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