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The displacements happened from critical tiger habitats, according to RTI response accessed by DTE A total 18,493 families in 215 villages across Protected Areas (PA) in India have been displaced in the 48 years since the inception of Project Tiger, the Union government's flagship scheme for tiger conservation. The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate

Change shared the information in response to a query filed under the Right to Information (RTI) Act and accessed by Down to Earth. PAs comprise wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and conservation reserves.

The displacements, according to the RTI response, happened from the core areas (also known as critical tiger habitats) created under the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA), 1972. The population of tigers in the country plummeted by the second half of the 20th century due to an increase in unrestricted killings following the declaration of the species as vermin, hunting and habitat loss. This loss in population led to the creation of the First Tiger Task Force in 1972. At the end of the 19th century, there were around 40,000 tigers in India, which came down to 1,900 by the time the task force started work, according to the committee's report submitted to the central government in August 1972. In its recommendations, the task force talked about the creation of "inviolable spaces", which are

areas of wilderness undisturbed by humans (mostly forest dwellers). Although the WLPA created the legal framework for settling rights in PAs, there was no legislative or policy framework to govern resettlement from core areas of national parks.

The mechanism, however, was set in place only in the 2006 amendment of the WLPA – on the basis of the Second Tiger Task Force report of 2005. The amendment, for the first time, brought the idea of “voluntary relocation” within the purview of law. Experts, however, labelled the data for the number of displacements that took place between 1972 and 2006 shoddy, for there was no mechanism to oversee the displacement process.

Displacement history

Displacements from the PAs increased manifold after the 2006 amendment. This was partly because the state authorities blamed

forest-dwelling communities for the local extinction of tiger population in Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan in 2003-04. Till 2005, 2,900 families from 80 villages had been displaced, according to the Second Tiger Task Force Report. Between 2005 and 2020, 135 villages with 15,593 families were displaced. Conflict between the villages in the forest and the state are brewing everywhere – from Rajaji Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand to Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu. A recent study by Pune-based non-profit Kalpavrikah, in collaboration with Environment Justice (EJ) Atlas, mapped out these conflicts in 26 PAs across the country. Between 2005 and 2020, the budgetary allocations to the Project Tiger increased by 1,150 per cent: To Rs 350 crore in 2019-20 from Rs 28 crore in 2006-07. Project Tiger finances tiger reserves, including relocation projects. The major jump in the budgetary allocation, however, had happened in 2009-10, immediately after the local extension in Panna Tiger Reserve in 2009: The amount

shot to Rs 150 crore in 2009-10 from Rs 28 crore in 2008-09. While the allocations increased manifold, the compensation amount for relocation only marginally increased from to Rs 10 lakh in 2006 from Rs 1 lakh in 1986.

Currently, there are still 496 villages with a population of 41,086 forest-dwellers across India's critical tiger habitats, according to the RTI response.

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