

Debate Surrounding Village Relocation for Tiger Reserves

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Why in News?

- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has intervened in the debate surrounding village relocations from tiger reserves.
- The commission responded to complaints against the National Tiger Conservation Authority's (NTCA) June advisory requesting state forest departments to submit action plans for village relocations.

Legal and Procedural Requirements for Relocation:

- **Families living inside tiger habitat:**

- As per **NTCA**, 591 villages comprising 64,801 families live inside critical tiger habitats, also known as core areas, in 54 tiger reserves across 19 states.
- So far, 251 villages with 25,007 families have been relocated outside tiger reserves.

- **Legal requirements:**

- **Under the Wildlife Protection Act**, areas free of human settlements can be created in the core of tiger reserves.
- However, this is to be done after recognising the rights of tribal communities under **the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006**, and with the informed **consent of the Gram Sabha** concerned.

- **Procedural requirements (Voluntary Village Relocation Program [VVRP] of the NTCA):**

- Additionally, before the voluntary relocation,
 - **The state government has to conclude** (based on consultations with ecological and social scientists),
 - That the activities of the tribal communities or forest dwellers or their presence are sufficient to **cause irreversible damage to tigers and their habitat**.
- They have to also conclude that there is **no other reasonable option** for the community to co-exist with tigers.

- **Compensation:**

- The NTCA had raised the **relocation compensation** for families opting for voluntary relocation **from ₹10 lakh to ₹15 lakh per family in 2021**.
- Those accepting the resettlement package receive two hectares of land, homestead land, house construction assistance, a financial incentive, and basic amenities, including water, sanitation, electricity, and telecommunication.

Debate Surrounding Village Relocations from Tiger Reserves:

- **Opposition to NTCA's advisory:**

- NTCA advised state forest departments to **prioritise the relocation of villages from core tiger habitats across 54 tiger reserves**.
- However, this advisory prompted pushback from over 150 tribal rights groups and activists.
- The petition to NCST pointed out that the NTCA letter did not dwell on the legal and procedural requirements, making it violative of laws.
- They argued that NTCA's approach violates FRA and the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act 2006, as **village relocation should be voluntary**.

- **NCST take on NTCA advisory:**

- **NCST requested an update** from NTCA on village relocations and their adherence to NCST's prior recommendations.
- **The commission also seeks an action-taken report** from the Union Environment Ministry and NTCA on its 2018 recommendations to revise the compensation for villagers who voluntarily relocate from tiger reserves.
- The NCST wants to ensure this package aligns with the **2013 Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act's** guidelines and entitlements.

Conclusion:

- NCST's intervention underscores the **need to balance tiger conservation with tribal rights**, ensuring that relocation policies comply with legal requirements.
 - By engaging with NTCA, the Environment Ministry, and tribal representatives, NCST aims to **create a fair relocation framework** that respects both conservation goals and tribal communities' rights.
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Q.1. What is the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)?

The NCST is a constitutional body in India that works to protect the social, economic, educational, and cultural interests of Scheduled Tribes (STs).

Q.2. What is the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006?

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 legally recognises the rights of forest-dwelling communities and tribal populations in India.

News: Scheduled Tribes panel to seek report from NTCA on villages' relocation from tiger reserves

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