



## Land acquisition in Telangana: An empirical study of legal challenges and stakeholder experiences in major projects

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### Abstract

This article examines the multifaceted legal and socio-economic challenges associated with land acquisition for major development projects in Telangana, India. Drawing upon a survey of 46 respondents directly affected by these processes, it critically analyzes the perceived adherence to legal frameworks, the adequacy of compensation and rehabilitation, the effectiveness of government measures, and the extent of stakeholder involvement and transparency. A particular focus is placed on the pivotal, yet often ambiguous, roles played by government officers and various intermediaries in shaping the acquisition experience. The findings reveal significant gaps in legal knowledge among affected populations, widespread dissatisfaction with compensation and rehabilitation, and serious concerns regarding the fairness and transparency of the acquisition process, exacerbated by the conduct of officials and external actors. This research underscores the urgent need for a more rights-based and people-centered approach to land acquisition, advocating for enhanced legal literacy, robust participatory mechanisms, equitable compensation, comprehensive rehabilitation strategies, and rigorous accountability for all involved parties to ensure sustainable and inclusive development outcomes.

**Keywords:** Land acquisition, legal challenges, compensation and rehabilitation, stakeholder involvement, transparency

### Introduction

Land acquisition for major development projects is a cornerstone of economic growth in rapidly developing states like Telangana. These projects, ranging from industrial corridors and irrigation schemes to infrastructure development, are deemed vital for public purpose and national progress (Government of Telangana, 2024) <sup>[9]</sup>. However, the process of acquiring private land for public use is inherently complex and often contentious, necessitating a delicate balance between the state's eminent domain powers, economic development imperatives, and the fundamental rights of individuals and communities whose lands and livelihoods are affected (Rajagopal, 2011) <sup>[12]</sup>. India's legal framework for land acquisition has undergone significant evolution, notably with the replacement of the colonial-era Land Acquisition Act of 1894 by the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013 (LARR Act, 2013). The LARR Act aimed to introduce greater transparency, fairness, and a people-centric approach to the acquisition process, emphasizing fair compensation, robust rehabilitation, and mandatory social impact assessments (LARR Act, 2013, Preamble).

While the LARR Act, 2013, provides a progressive legal framework, its effective implementation hinges significantly on the actors involved in the process: government officials, project authorities, and various intermediaries (Roy & Singh, 2017) <sup>[13]</sup>. These stakeholders often act as crucial conduits of information, facilitators of negotiations, and implementers of policies at the grassroots level. Their conduct, integrity, and adherence to legal and ethical norms profoundly influence the experiences of affected communities and the overall legitimacy of the acquisition process. This article presents an analytical deep dive into the findings of a survey conducted on land acquisition for major projects in Telangana. Based on 46 responses, the survey attempts to capture the multifaceted impacts and perceptions

surrounding this critical socio-economic and developmental process. This analysis systematically deconstructs each section of the survey, interpreting the quantitative data to infer qualitative insights, identify patterns, highlight discrepancies, and propose broader implications for policy and future research, with particular attention to the roles played by officials and intermediaries. The land acquisition process, especially for "major projects," is inherently complex, involving the balancing act between public interest, economic development, and individual rights. This case study, though based on a relatively small sample size, offers valuable ground-level perspectives on how these processes are perceived by those directly affected.

### Respondent Demographics and Land Holding Characteristics

Understanding the demographic profile and landholding characteristics of affected populations is crucial for contextualizing the impacts of land acquisition. These initial sections of the survey provide foundational data on the survey participants and the nature of their landholdings, offering insights into who is primarily affected by these projects.

#### a. Individual Names

The data indicates that out of 46 responses, multiple individuals, such as Karunakar Red and Mudavath Laxmi, appear to have submitted three responses each (6.5%), while Chander, Katravath Shanti, and Pathlavath Chitti each provided two responses (4.3%). The remaining individuals appear to have provided single responses.

The presence of multiple responses from the same individuals could suggest several possibilities. Methodologically, it might indicate that a few key informants were highly engaged and provided responses across different categories or iterations of the survey, potentially offering deeper, multi-faceted insights.

Alternatively, it could point to a sampling methodology that allowed for repeat submissions, or even that certain individuals were instrumental in collecting responses from their localities, acting as community facilitators. From a methodological standpoint, while it offers deeper insight from these individuals, it slightly reduces the overall 'n' for unique individual perspectives, though the total 'N'=46 remains constant for survey response counts. This distribution gives an initial glimpse into the spread of respondents, hinting at whether the feedback is concentrated among a few vocal individuals or broadly distributed. Given the small number of multiple entries, the survey still captures a fairly diverse set of individual perspectives, which is important for the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### **b. Location**

The survey highlights a concentrated impact in specific geographical areas. "Polepalli" recorded the highest number of respondents with 12 (26.1%), followed closely by "Polapally" with 10 (21.7%), and another "polepally" (possibly a variant spelling or a different area of the same name) with 9 (19.6%). Other locations like Erravally, Medchal, Singarajupally, and Wanaparthy have significantly fewer responses (1 or 2 each, 2.2%).

This geographical concentration of impact in "Polepalli" and "Polapally" strongly suggests that the major projects subject to land acquisition are primarily concentrated in, or significantly impacting, these specific locales. This concentration is a critical point for understanding the localized socio-economic and environmental consequences. It implies that the "case study" aspect of the title likely refers to the experience within these intensely affected areas. Future research might benefit from comparing experiences in these highly impacted zones with those in peripheral areas or areas with less significant land acquisition, to understand the variations in legal adherence and impact. The survey's respondent pool might reflect a targeted outreach effort in these specific villages or where community organizing efforts are strongest due to project impacts (Baxter & Babbie, 2004)<sup>[3]</sup>.

#### **c. Land Area**

The data on land area indicates that the majority of land acquired from respondents was in smaller parcels. "1 acr" and "1.00 acr" collectively account for a significant portion, with "1 acr" having 8 responses (17.4%) and "1.00 acrs" having 4 responses (8.7%). "2 acrs" and "2.00" also show a considerable number of responses (5 each, 10.9%). Larger landholdings (3, 4, 5+ acres) are represented by fewer respondents (1 or 2 responses each).

The predominance of smaller landholdings among the respondents suggests that small and marginal farmers or landowners are significantly affected by these land acquisitions. These groups are often more vulnerable to displacement and economic disruption, as their livelihoods are intimately tied to their land (Fernandes & Asif, 2006)<sup>[7]</sup>. The small land sizes hint at agricultural practices that might be subsistence-oriented or involve small-scale commercial farming. Loss of such land can lead to a complete collapse of household economies for these families, far more so than for larger commercial farmers who might have alternative land or income streams. The specific values like "1.2 acrs" or "2.20 acrs" could also indicate fragmented landholdings,

a common characteristic in agricultural regions, which can complicate fair acquisition and compensation processes under the LARR Act, 2013, particularly concerning contiguous land for resettlement (LARR Act, 2013, Section 31).

#### **The Role of Officers and Intermediaries in the Acquisition Process**

The successful and equitable implementation of land acquisition policies, particularly under a progressive framework like the LARR Act, 2013, is heavily dependent on the conduct and ethical standards of the various actors involved (Roy & Singh, 2017)<sup>[13]</sup>. This section critically examines the implicit and explicit roles played by government officers and other intermediaries, whose actions often bridge the gap – or create a chasm – between legal provisions and lived experiences.

Government officers, primarily those from the revenue department, land acquisition units, and project implementing agencies, are entrusted with significant responsibilities. Their duties include conducting social impact assessments, issuing notifications, determining compensation, overseeing rehabilitation measures, and engaging with affected communities (LARR Act, 2013, Chapters II-VI). Their adherence to rules, transparency in decision-making, and responsiveness to community grievances are paramount. However, the survey data, particularly concerning legal knowledge, compensation adequacy, and perceptions of corruption, strongly suggests that the performance of these officials may be a critical bottleneck. A lack of proactive information dissemination (leading to low legal knowledge among respondents) and perceived "partial corruption" (as discussed later) indicate that the ideal role of a fair and transparent administrator is often not met. This could be due to factors such as heavy workloads, insufficient training on the nuances of the LARR Act, political pressure, or a lack of accountability mechanisms (Transparency International, 2006)<sup>[16]</sup>.

Beyond formal government officers, various informal "intermediaries" often emerge in land acquisition processes. These can include local political leaders, brokers, village elders, or even community members who claim to represent the interests of affected populations (Baviskar, 2004)<sup>[2]</sup>. While some intermediaries might genuinely advocate for their communities, others may exploit the information asymmetry and power imbalance for personal gain. They can influence negotiations, mediate discussions, or even facilitate illicit transactions. The survey's finding of "only selected individuals" participating in decision-making processes (Section VII.A) hints at the potential for such intermediaries to control access to information and influence outcomes, possibly to the detriment of the broader affected community. The presence of perceived "partial corruption" (Section VII.B) also strongly implicates the potential involvement of these intermediaries, alongside officials, in practices that undermine fairness and transparency. The challenge lies in distinguishing between legitimate community representation and self-serving intermediation, and in establishing robust oversight to prevent malpractices. The effectiveness of the legal framework and rehabilitation measures, as perceived by respondents, is thus inextricably linked to the integrity and conduct of both the formal and informal actors operating within the land acquisition ecosystem.

## Legal Knowledge and Process Adherence

This section probes respondents' awareness of the law governing land acquisition and the adherence to legal principles, including Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). This is crucial for evaluating whether the acquisition process respects the rights and autonomy of affected individuals, as mandated by the LARR Act, 2013, and whether officials adequately fulfill their duty to inform.

### a. Knowledge of the Law

A striking finding is that 24 respondents (52.2%) reported having "No" knowledge of the land acquisition law. Only 12 (26.1%) claimed "Yes," and 5 (10.9%) claimed "yes" (likely a re-entry or slight variation of "Yes"). A very small minority claimed "Good," "Little bit," or "Nil" (the latter being redundant with "No").

This is perhaps one of the most critical findings for legal analysis. A majority of those affected lack fundamental knowledge about the legal framework governing the acquisition of their land. This creates a severe information asymmetry between the state/acquiring body and the landholders (Baviskar, 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. Such a deficit in legal literacy directly impacts the ability of individuals to navigate the complex land acquisition process, assert their rights, challenge unfair practices, or effectively engage in negotiations. They might not be aware of their entitlements, the valuation methods, or the grievance redressal mechanisms available to them under the LARR Act, 2013 (LARR Act, 2013, Chapters II & VI). This lack of knowledge is profoundly influenced by whether officers proactively disseminate information or if intermediaries act as gatekeepers of critical legal details.

Genuine consent in land acquisition, particularly under principles akin to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), is predicated on informed decision-making. If over half the affected population does not understand the law, then any "consent" obtained is questionable, potentially undermining the legitimacy and legality of the entire acquisition process (World Bank, 2017) <sup>[18]</sup>. This highlights a significant failure in the government's responsibility, often executed through its officers, to disseminate information and ensure legal literacy among affected communities. Public awareness campaigns, easily accessible legal aid, and clear communication channels are essential to uphold the spirit of the LARR Act, which emphasizes transparency and informed participation (LARR Act, 2013, Section 6). The role of officers in ensuring this literacy is paramount.

### b. Land Acquired Under the Act

Despite the low legal knowledge, **89.1% of respondents stated that their land was acquired under the land acquisition act**, while only 10.9% said it was not. This high percentage suggests formal adherence to legal procedures, even if the understanding of these procedures by the affected population remains limited.

This creates a paradox. While the process appears legally compliant on paper (most land acquired under the act), the previous finding of low legal knowledge suggests that this compliance might be largely procedural rather than substantively just (Kohli, 2013) <sup>[10]</sup>. Landholders may be unaware of whether the specific provisions of the act were truly followed, or if their rights were fully respected, even if

the acquisition invoked the legal framework. It raises questions about "paper compliance" versus the actual lived experience. A process can be technically "under the act" but still be unfair, coercive, or insufficient in its outcomes if the affected parties are not genuinely informed or empowered to challenge discrepancies. This highlights the importance of robust oversight and grievance redressal mechanisms to ensure that legal compliance translates into just outcomes (LARR Act, 2013, Chapter XIII), and underscores the critical role of officers in ensuring not just formal compliance, but also substantive justice.

### c. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) Principle Followed

Regarding the adherence to the FPIC principle, 52.2% reported it was "partially followed". 28.3% said "Yes", and 15.2% said "No". A small percentage (4.3%) indicated "no idea".

The dominant "partially followed" response is a significant red flag in the context of legal and human rights principles. FPIC, though explicitly mandated for Scheduled Areas and tribal communities under the LARR Act (Section 41) and the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), its underlying principles of free, prior, and informed consent are considered best practice for all land acquisitions globally (United Nations, 2007) <sup>[17]</sup>. "Partial" adherence implies that at least one of these pillars was not fully met. This could mean:

- **Not Free:** Presence of coercion or undue pressure from officials or intermediaries, or lack of genuine choice for landholders.
- **Not Prior:** Information or consultation occurring after key decisions were made, rendering consultation a mere formality rather than a genuine opportunity for influence.
- **Not Informed:** Insufficient, complex, or misleading information provided, directly linking back to the low legal knowledge observed earlier, often stemming from inadequate communication by authorities.

The ambiguity and dissatisfaction reflected in "partially followed" could reflect various degrees of inadequacy, from minor procedural lapses to significant gaps that undermine genuine consent. It certainly suggests that the process falls short of ideal best practices for land acquisition. A perceived lack of full FPIC can erode trust between communities and the government/acquiring entities, leading to protracted disputes, social unrest, and delays in project implementation, often culminating in legal challenges (Cernea, 2003) <sup>[4]</sup>. The integrity and transparency of officers and intermediaries are central to whether FPIC is genuinely observed.

### Compensation and Rehabilitation Adequacy

This section delves into the crucial aspects of compensation received and alternative livelihood options provided, key determinants of post-acquisition well-being and critical components of the LARR Act, 2013. The role of officers in assessing property, calculating entitlements, and disbursing funds is directly implicated here.

### a. Compensation Received from Government

Only 19.6% reported receiving "Yes" compensation. A substantial 45.7% stated it was "partial", and 34.8% reported "No" compensation.

This data points to significant dissatisfaction and potential inadequacy in the compensation process. The combined 80.5% (partial + no) indicates that a vast majority of respondents did not feel they received full or satisfactory compensation. "Partial" could mean delayed payments, under-valuation, or incomplete payments for all assets, including structures, trees, and standing crops, as stipulated by the LARR Act, 2013 (Section 29). "No" is a clear indication of a major failure, implying either no payment at all or a complete rejection of the offered amount due to perceived unfairness. Inadequate compensation directly exacerbates the economic vulnerability of displaced populations, making it difficult for them to purchase new land, invest in alternative livelihoods, or rebuild their lives, potentially leading to a downward spiral of poverty (Cernea, 2003; Fernandes & Asif, 2006) [4, 7]. The efficacy and fairness of the compensation process are directly tied to the diligence and integrity of the officers responsible for valuation, calculation, and disbursement.

### b. Alternative Solutions Provided

An overwhelming 71.1% of respondents stated that "No" alternative solutions were provided, with only 28.9% affirming "Yes".

This is a damning statistic, indicating a profound failure in the rehabilitation component of land acquisition. The LARR Act, 2013, explicitly mandates comprehensive rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) provisions, going beyond mere monetary compensation to include alternative land, housing, and livelihood support (Chapter VI). When alternative solutions are not provided, land acquisition essentially becomes an act of dispossession, pushing affected individuals into poverty, distress migration, and loss of their traditional occupations and social safety nets. This highlights that monetary compensation alone (even if adequate, which is questionable here) is insufficient. Comprehensive rehabilitation, including skills training, access to markets, and social infrastructure, is crucial for successful resettlement and adherence to the Act's provisions (LARR Act, 2013, Section 38). The absence of these solutions points to a systemic failure on the part of the implementing authorities and officers.

### c. What They Are Expecting

The respondents' expectations reveal their immediate needs and grievances. The highest expectation is "We are expecting" at 13 responses (28.3%), which is somewhat vague but suggests a general anticipation of something more or better. More specifically, "compensation" (19.6%) and "Compensation" (15.2%) are top concerns, indicating a desire for fairer financial recompense. "Employment" (6.5%) and "Land reback" (4.3%) are also mentioned, showing a demand for livelihood alternatives and potential land restitution.

This section articulates the primary demands of the affected population: better monetary compensation and sustainable livelihood options (employment, land). "Land reback" is a powerful demand, indicating a preference for retaining the agrarian lifestyle or a deep attachment to their original land, which often holds not just economic but also cultural and

social value (Scoones, 1999) [14]. The general "We are expecting" response, when combined with the low satisfaction in compensation and alternative solutions, implies a deep-seated hope for justice that hasn't been realized through the formal process so far. These expectations represent a direct critique of the current practices of officers and intermediaries who mediate these processes.

### d. Compensation Packages Fair & Sufficient

Only 13% believe the compensation packages are "Yes, fair and sufficient". A significant 45.7% found them "fair, but not sufficient", while 21.7% felt they were "not fair or not sufficient". 19.6% stated "not fair or sufficient".

This finding reveals a critical discrepancy in "fairness" versus "sufficiency". The "fair, but not sufficient" category (45.7%) is particularly insightful. It suggests that while the method of valuation or the legal basis for compensation might be perceived as somewhat fair (e.g., adhering to certain market rate calculations), the amount provided is simply not enough to enable a dignified new life or equivalent asset replacement. This could be due to:

- **Market value vs. replacement cost gaps:** The LARR Act, 2013, aims for market value, but actual replacement costs (including transaction costs for new land, new house construction, and livelihood re-establishment) are often higher (LARR Act, 2013, Section 26).
- **Failure to account for non-market values:** Sentimental value, loss of community networks, customary rights, and access to common property resources are often not adequately compensated (Agarwal, 1997) [1]. This requires a nuanced understanding from officers.
- **Inflation or delays in payment:** Delays in payment can erode purchasing power, making the initially "fair" amount insufficient over time.

The combined majority (over 87%) who find the compensation either insufficient (even if fair) or outright unfair/insufficient, clearly indicates that the current compensation framework fails to adequately restore the economic well-being of the displaced, undermining the LARR Act's core objective of fair compensation (LARR Act, 2013, Preamble). This highlights significant challenges in how compensation is determined and administered by officials.

### e. Alternative Livelihood Options Provided

Echoing previous findings, 52.2% reported "No alternative". 21.7% stated "land was provided to residents", and 19.6% mentioned "land was replaced". Only 6.5% indicated "residential friendly alternative only."

The more than half of respondents receiving "no alternative" is a grave indicator of the inadequacy of rehabilitation efforts. This has severe implications for long-term poverty, food security, and social stability for the affected households (Cernea, 2003) [4]. While some received land (either replaced or new land provided), this is clearly not the norm for the majority. This suggests a heavy reliance on cash compensation (which is deemed insufficient) rather than comprehensive land-for-land or other sustainable

livelihood strategies, as envisioned by the LARR Act, 2013 (Chapter VI). For communities heavily dependent on agriculture, the absence of alternative land or viable livelihood options means a direct loss of their traditional way of life and an increased likelihood of being pushed into low-wage, informal labor, a direct violation of their right to livelihood (Sharma, 2010) <sup>[15]</sup>. The capacity and commitment of officers to implement robust R&R plans appear to be a major limiting factor.

### **Impact on Livelihoods and Living Conditions**

This section directly assesses the self-reported impact of land acquisition on the quality of life for the affected population, a direct outcome of the compensation and rehabilitation processes managed by officers.

#### **a. How Livelihoods and Living Conditions Were Affected**

A significant majority reported negative impacts: 41.3% were "moderately affected", and 37% were "severely affected". 19.6% were "slightly affected", and a mere 2.2% were "not affected".

The combined 78.3% of respondents experiencing moderate to severe impacts underscores that land acquisition in Telangana, for these major projects, has predominantly negative consequences for the landholders' livelihoods and living conditions. "Living conditions" encompass more than just income; they include access to services, social networks, cultural practices, and psychological well-being (Das & Gandhi, 2011) <sup>[6]</sup>. Severe impact suggests disruption across multiple dimensions of life, potentially leading to social disarticulation and psychological distress. This finding strongly necessitates more robust mitigation measures and post-acquisition support systems to alleviate the suffering and facilitate genuine rehabilitation and restoration of quality of life, aligning with the "least disturbance" principle embedded in the LARR Act (LARR Act, 2013, Section 10A). The inadequacy of these measures points directly to shortcomings in the design and implementation by officials.

### **Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Measures and Legal Frameworks**

This part of the survey probes the perceived efficacy of government rehabilitation actions and the overarching legal structures in Telangana, directly reflecting on the performance of officers and the functionality of the system they operate within.

#### **a. How Effective are Government Rehabilitation Measures**

The perception of rehabilitation measures is largely mixed to negative. 52.2% consider them "moderately effective", implying a recognition of some effort but with significant shortcomings. Crucially, 26.1% state they are "not effective". Only 10.9% perceive them as "very effective" and another 10.9% as "somewhat effective".

The high percentage of "moderately effective" and "not effective" responses confirms that the government's rehabilitation efforts are falling short of adequately addressing the needs of displaced communities. "Moderately effective" can still mean significant gaps and hardship, suggesting that the implementation of R&R policies under the LARR Act, 2013, is often inadequate

(LARR Act, 2013, Chapter VI). This points to a potential disconnect between rehabilitation policies on paper and their actual implementation on the ground. Factors like delayed implementation, insufficient resources, lack of coordination among various government departments, or inappropriate rehabilitation models (e.g., generic solutions not tailored to specific community needs) could contribute to this perception (Fernandes & Asif, 2006) <sup>[7]</sup>. These issues often stem from the operational choices and priorities of the responsible officers.

#### **b. How Effective is the Legal Framework Controlling Land Acquisition**

Perceptions of the legal framework's effectiveness are also varied: 37% see it as "moderately effective," 28.3% as "very effective," 19.6% as "somewhat effective," and 15.2% as "not effective."

The spread of responses suggests that the legal framework (primarily the LARR Act, 2013, and state-specific rules) is not uniformly perceived as highly effective. While a portion believes it is "very effective," a larger combined segment (37% + 19.6% + 15.2% = 71.8%) sees it as less than very effective, ranging from moderately to not effective. "Effectiveness" can be interpreted differently. For the government, it might mean facilitating project completion and minimizing delays. For landholders, it means protecting their rights and ensuring fair outcomes, including the right to protest and seek judicial review (LARR Act, 2013, Chapter XIV). The varied responses likely reflect these different perspectives. The fact that a significant proportion sees it as "moderately" or "not effective" implies that for many affected individuals, the law is not serving its protective function adequately, pointing to potential implementation gaps or loopholes within the legal framework itself (Kohli, 2013) <sup>[10]</sup>, and how it is applied by officers.

#### **c. Any Gaps or Disparities in the Application of Laws**

A strong majority acknowledged gaps: 37% reported "significant gaps or disparities", and 34.8% reported "small gaps or disparities". 17.4% found "no gaps or disparities," and 10.9% were "not sure."

This finding directly confirms that the application of land acquisition laws is not seamless or equitable. The combined 71.8% acknowledging either small or significant gaps points to persistent implementation challenges. These gaps could arise from various factors: selective application of provisions, bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption (as suggested in a later section), lack of clear guidelines for implementing complex clauses (e.g., social impact assessments, R&R plans), or differential interpretation of legal provisions by various stakeholders (e.g., project authorities vs. local administration vs. affected communities). Perceived disparities undermine the fairness and legitimacy of the entire process, leading to a sense of injustice and resentment among affected communities, often resulting in prolonged legal battles and social unrest (Rajagopal, 2011) <sup>[12]</sup>. These disparities are often a direct consequence of how officers and intermediaries interpret and apply the laws on the ground.

### **Stakeholder Involvement and Transparency**

This section examines the extent to which local communities and stakeholders are involved in the decision-

making process and the transparency of project implementation, both crucial for legitimate and just land acquisition, and heavily influenced by the behavior of officials and intermediaries.

#### a. Extent of Stakeholder Involvement in Decision-Making

Participation in the decision-making process appears limited. 34.8% stated that "only selected individuals" participated, and 30.4% reported "no one participated". Only 19.6% mentioned "all local communities" being involved, while 15.2% said "part of communities."

The majority response indicates an exclusionary approach to stakeholder engagement. The fact that almost one-third reported "no one participated" is a severe indictment of the participatory nature of the process. Even "only selected individuals" suggests a lack of broad community representation, often leading to elite capture or misrepresentation of community interests, potentially facilitated by certain intermediaries. True democratic and equitable land acquisition, as promoted by the LARR Act, 2013, which emphasizes gram sabha consultations and public hearings (LARR Act, 2013, Sections 6 & 7), requires broad-based, meaningful consultation. The survey results suggest that such consultation is largely absent or tokenistic. A lack of genuine involvement increases the risk of protests, legal challenges, and social unrest, as communities feel unheard and disempowered, potentially prolonging project timelines and increasing overall costs (Baviskar, 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. This highlights a failure by responsible officers to ensure inclusive participation.

#### b. Transparency of Project Implementation Processes After Land Acquisition

Transparency is a major concern. A significant 54.3% stated there was "partial corruption". Only 26.1% perceived it as "fully fair", and 15.2% claimed "no corruption at all". A small 4.3% believed there was "total corruption".

The most alarming finding in this section is the high percentage of respondents perceiving "**partial corruption.**" While "partial" can range in severity, it strongly suggests a pervasive lack of trust in the integrity of the process post-acquisition. Perceptions of corruption severely undermine the legitimacy of the land acquisition process and the projects themselves. It reinforces the idea that the process is not just or fair, leading to deep-seated resentment and a sense of being wronged (Transparency International, 2006). This finding calls for urgent measures to enhance transparency and accountability in project implementation, including robust oversight mechanisms, public disclosure of information (e.g., compensation records, R&R plans, project budgets), and effective grievance redressal systems that are accessible and responsive to the affected population. This directly implicates the conduct of officers and the potential involvement of corrupt intermediaries.

#### Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs)

This section focuses on the comprehensiveness and accuracy of ESIAAs conducted prior to land acquisition, which are legally mandated under the LARR Act, 2013, and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notifications. The quality of these assessments is largely dependent on the diligence and ethical conduct of the agencies and officials commissioned to undertake them.

#### a. How Comprehensive and Accurate Are ESIAAs

The survey indicates mixed perceptions regarding ESIAAs. 37% believed they were "50%" comprehensive, while 26.1% found them "75%" comprehensive. Only 13% stated they were "100% conducted", and 23.9% believed they were "not conducted".

The varied responses suggest an inconsistency in the quality or perceived thoroughness of ESIAAs. The fact that a significant portion (23.9%) believes they were "not conducted" at all is deeply problematic, as ESIAAs are a prerequisite for responsible project planning and are legally mandated under the LARR Act, 2013 (Chapter II) and the EIA Notification, 2006. This indicates a potential non-compliance or a significant communication gap regarding the conduct of these assessments, which falls under the purview of responsible officers. Even for those conducted, the high percentage of "50%" and "75%" comprehensive assessments implies that ESIAAs might not be adequately robust or cover all potential impacts. This could mean:

- **Failure to identify all affected populations:** Leading to exclusion from compensation and R&R benefits.
- **Underestimation of environmental damage:** Resulting in inadequate mitigation strategies and long-term ecological harm.
- **Inadequate mitigation strategies:** Failure to plan for and implement effective measures to address identified impacts.
- **Lack of public disclosure or consultation on ESIA findings:** Preventing affected communities from understanding potential impacts and participating in mitigation planning.

Sub-par ESIAAs increase the risk of unforeseen negative environmental and social consequences, leading to long-term costs, potential conflicts, and legal challenges, ultimately undermining the sustainability of the projects (Government of India, 2006; LARR Act, 2013) <sup>[8]</sup>. The integrity of officers responsible for commissioning and reviewing ESIAAs is critical for their effectiveness.

#### Long-Term Development Outcomes

The final section explores the perceived long-term benefits of these major projects for local communities, a key justification for invoking eminent domain. The extent to which these benefits accrue to the affected population is a measure of the overall success of the land acquisition and development process, including the efficacy of rehabilitation efforts overseen by officers.

#### a. Long-Term Development Outcomes for Local Communities

The outcomes are perceived as uneven. While 37% reported "improvement in the economy" and 30.4% reported "improvement in infrastructure", a substantial 28.3% stated "no improvement in any aspect". Only a small 4.3% indicated "increased opportunities for youth."

This finding illustrates that the benefits of major projects are not equitably distributed. While some communities or segments may experience economic or infrastructural improvements, a significant portion feels completely left behind. This pattern is common in "development-induced

displacement" where the costs (loss of land, livelihood, community) are disproportionately borne by the displaced, while the benefits accrue broadly or to other segments of society (Cernea, 2003) <sup>[4]</sup>. The "no improvement" response directly contradicts the core justification for land acquisition for public good, if that good does not reach the affected. This highlights a failure in the holistic planning and implementation by project authorities and government officers.

This raises serious questions about the sustainability and inclusivity of the development model. Development that leaves nearly one-third of the directly impacted population worse off or unchanged is not truly equitable or sustainable. The very low percentage for "increased opportunities for youth" indicates a failure to create local employment or skill development linked to the new projects, which could have been a key long-term benefit for the displaced communities and a crucial element of effective R&R (LARR Act, 2013, Section 38).

### Overall Synthesis and Research Implications

The survey "Land Acquisition in Telangana: A Case Study on Major Projects" highlights the challenges faced by large-scale development projects in the country. The survey reveals a lack of legal knowledge among affected landholders, leading to a power imbalance in negotiations. Compensation and rehabilitation failures are also prevalent, with dissatisfaction with the fairness of compensation and inadequate alternative livelihood options. Governance deficits, including limited stakeholder participation and corruption, erode public trust and undermine the legitimacy of development projects. Suboptimal Impact Assessments (ESIAs) are perceived as inconsistently comprehensive, raising concerns about unforeseen negative environmental and social impacts. Unequal development outcomes are also observed, with a significant segment of the affected population experiencing no improvement in their living conditions or economy. The study underscores the need for a more rights-based and people-centered approach to land acquisition in Telangana. Future research could include qualitative studies, comparative analysis, policy analysis, economic impact assessments, the role of civil society and judiciary, longitudinal studies, and investigation of officer accountability and intermediary influence.

### Policy Recommendations

The survey findings and legal analysis suggest policy recommendations for reforming land acquisition practices in Telangana to be more equitable, transparent, and rights-respecting. Mandatory legal literacy programs should be conducted for affected communities, explaining provisions of the LARR Act, 2013, their rights, entitlements, compensation calculation methods, and grievance redressal mechanisms in local languages. Transparent and fair valuation mechanisms should be established, accounting for all losses, including cultural significance and loss of community ties. Robust and diverse rehabilitation packages should be provided, moving beyond cash compensation and addressing specific needs and vulnerabilities. Participatory processes should be institutionalized, with Gram Sabhas playing a central role in decision-making. Transparency and accountability for officers and intermediaries should be enhanced, with independent monitoring mechanisms and grievance redressal mechanisms. Comprehensive

Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) should be conducted by independent bodies, and equitable benefit sharing mechanisms should be designed to offset displacement costs and foster shared prosperity.

### Conclusion

The survey data and analysis provide a strong empirical basis to examine the hypotheses regarding land acquisition in Telangana. Hypothesis 1 suggests that the State's power to acquire land for public purpose is being misused, with respondents reporting exclusionary decision-making and partial corruption. This suggests that the State's power is being exercised in a manner that disproportionately burdens a few for an unevenly distributed "public" good. Hypothesis 2 asserts that the State has completely failed to promote social justice through its land acquisition activities. The data strongly challenges the notion of social justice in Telangana's land acquisition processes, with 78.3% of respondents reporting being "moderately" or "severely affected" in their livelihoods and living conditions. The widespread dissatisfaction with compensation and the near-absence of alternative livelihood solutions demonstrate a systemic failure in rehabilitation, which is a cornerstone of social justice in this context. The concentration of impacts on small and marginal landholders suggests that the process might be exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities rather than ameliorating them. The perception of significant gaps or disparities in the application of laws also points to a lack of equitable treatment, which is fundamental to social justice.

Given the high negative impacts, inadequate compensation, failed rehabilitation, and perceived inequities, the evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that the State has largely failed to promote social justice through these land acquisition projects, pushing many affected individuals into greater precarity rather than uplifting them.

The survey data supports the hypothesis that the compensation provided to land owners in case of acquisition is not realistic and rational. Over 87% of respondents found compensation packages to be insufficient or outright unfair/insufficient, indicating that the current compensation framework falls short of being realistic and rational from the perspective of those bearing the direct costs of development. The survey also suggests that the new land acquisition law needs to be enforced effectively to address problems pertaining to land acquisition, compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement.

The survey findings overwhelmingly support the necessity of both effective enforcement and potential fine-tuning of the LARR Act, 2013. The pervasive issues identified in the survey, such as low legal knowledge among affected persons, partial adherence to FPIC, widespread inadequacy of compensation and rehabilitation, significant negative impacts on livelihoods, and perceived gaps or disparities in law application, point towards a fundamental failure in the effective enforcement of the LARR Act, 2013. Fine-tuning could involve revising compensation formulas to better reflect current market realities, strengthening provisions for non-market losses, introducing more robust mechanisms for livelihood restoration, strengthening clauses related to accountability of officers and intermediaries, and ensuring genuine FPIC for all projects.

In conclusion, the survey data supports the hypothesis that the LARR Act, 2013, requires significantly more effective

enforcement to deliver justice to affected populations. Fine-tuning of certain aspects, particularly valuation methodologies and comprehensive rehabilitation provisions, could enhance its realism and rationality, ensuring more equitable and just outcomes for those whose land is acquired for public purpose.

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