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POLITICS OF EVICTION AND RESETTLEMENT: GOVERNING URBAN TRANSFORMATION IN KOLKATA

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of infrastructure in cities across the Global South has triggered waves of urban displacement, often framed as the necessary cost of modernization. In Kolkata, metro railway construction and environmental improvement programs have led to multiple episodes of eviction and resettlement, reshaping the spatial and political landscape of the city. This paper examines how these processes of eviction and relocation have been governed, resisted, and negotiated, focusing on the interplay between state institutions, community agency, and urban planning. Drawing on institutional theory, urban political economy, and case studies from the East-West Metro project, the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP), and canal bank evictions, the paper situates Kolkata's experience within broader global patterns of urban transformation. It argues that eviction and resettlement are not only outcomes of technocratic planning but also deeply political processes embedded in contested institutions, informal negotiations, and the evolving logics of urban governance. By analyzing how governance structures respond to displacement and how affected communities adapt or resist, the paper reveals the complex politics underpinning resettlement in contemporary Kolkata.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban transformation in the Global South is increasingly marked by large-scale infrastructure development projects—metro railways, expressways, and drainage improvements—that aim to modernize aging cities and make them "world-class." Yet, these projects often come at a social cost: the displacement and relocation of thousands of urban residents, many of whom live in informal settlements without legal tenure. In cities like Kolkata, where land scarcity intersects with deep inequalities, eviction and resettlement have become central to the politics of urban development. Over the past two decades, Kolkata has witnessed multiple waves of displacement linked to metro construction, canal rehabilitation, and flood-control projects. The East-West Metro corridor, for instance, has required underground tunneling through densely populated areas, causing not only structural damage to homes—as in the case of Bowbazar—but also mass relocation. Similarly, the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP), initiated with support from international donors, led to the eviction of thousands of families from canal banks. In each of these cases, the state justified displacement in the name of public interest and modernization. However, the affected communities often experienced dislocation, inadequate rehabilitation, and a profound disruption of social and economic networks. This paper examines how such instances of eviction and resettlement are governed in Kolkata. It explores the institutional logics that guide planning and compensation, the fragmented roles of municipal and state bodies,

and the strategies adopted by displaced communities to contest or adapt to resettlement. The paper argues that urban displacement cannot be fully understood without interrogating the political and institutional dynamics that structure it. Resettlement is not simply a spatial reordering of populations—it is a governance challenge that reveals deeper tensions between state authority, citizen rights, and the production of urban space. The politics of eviction in Kolkata unfold within a landscape of overlapping jurisdictions, informal settlements, and contested claims to land. State agencies such as the Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation (KMRC), the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), and the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA) play varying roles in planning, financing, and implementing projects. However, their actions are often constrained by legal ambiguities, budgetary limitations, and political pressures. At the same time, affected communities are not passive victims. They negotiate, resist, litigate, and sometimes co-produce resettlement outcomes. In doing so, they shape the very institutions that seek to manage them. This paper draws on existing literature and documented case studies to trace the institutional trajectories of urban displacement in Kolkata. It situates the city's experience within wider debates on resettlement, informality, and governance in urban studies. Through a critical examination of how institutions manage—or fail to manage—resettlement, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions about justice, participation, and the politics of urban development.

2. Literature Review: Displacement, Resettlement, and Urban Governance: Urban resettlement has long been recognized as a disruptive yet routine feature of development-led urban

transformation in the Global South. Beginning with Cernea's (2000) "impoverishment risks and reconstruction" model, scholars have highlighted how large infrastructure projects—dams, highways, and urban redevelopment schemes—displace populations without adequate compensation or support. While early studies focused largely on the economic and social impacts of resettlement, more recent work situates displacement within the broader frameworks of urban governance, informality, and political economy (Bhan, 2009; Roy, 2009; Dupont, 2008). The Indian experience with displacement has been particularly instructive. Researchers such as Fernandes (2007) and Baviskar (2003) documented how infrastructure-led eviction disproportionately affects the urban poor, particularly those in informal settlements. The rise of programs like the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) in the mid-2000s further deepened these tensions by institutionalizing urban "beautification" drives that displaced thousands in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata, often under the guise of slum improvement and infrastructure modernization (Coelho & Venkat, 2009; Baud &Nainan, 2008). Urban resettlement is rarely a linear process of relocation. Instead, it is shaped by contested claims to space, legal ambiguity, and institutional fragmentation. In many cases, formal legal tenure is absent or unclear, complicating questions of eligibility for compensation or alternative housing (Patel, Baptist, & D'Cruz, 2012). Meanwhile, implementation often suffers from poor inter-agency coordination, politicization of housing allocation, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms. These gaps give rise to informal negotiations, exclusions, and resistance movements that reveal the social and political life of resettlement (Dupont, 2008; Bhan & Jana, 2013).

Beyond India, global urban scholarship has expanded the conversation by interrogating how displacement is embedded in larger structures of urban inequality. In cities like Manila, Rio de Janeiro, and Nairobi, resettlement has been shown to follow logics of dispossession tied to neoliberal urbanism and speculative real estate (Shatkin, 2014; Harvey, 2003). Such displacement is often legitimized through narratives of environmental risk reduction or public interest, even as it disproportionately targets vulnerable populations. Scholars like Anguelovski (2013) and de Souza (2006) have explored how these processes trigger cycles of spatial exclusion and social vulnerability. The rise of urban political ecology and critical planning theory has further enriched understandings of urban displacement. These perspectives frame resettlement not as an isolated outcome, but as a manifestation of state strategies to regulate and reorder urban space (Roy, 2009). Here, planning becomes a tool of governance, used to prioritize infrastructure and capital over the rights of the urban poor. At the same time, governance is not monolithic. The urban state is fragmented across departments, agencies, and scales, often leading to contradictory or uneven interventions (Coelho et al., 2013). Importantly, some strands of research emphasize agency and resistance within resettlement contexts. Community mobilizations, legal interventions, and advocacy campaigns have shaped outcomes in cities like Chennai and Delhi, where displaced populations have successfully negotiated better rehabilitation packages or delayed evictions (Bhan, 2016; Patel et al., 2012). Such responses illustrate how affected populations can influence institutional behavior, even within constrained environments. In the case of Kolkata, displacement has followed both national and local patterns, shaped by infrastructural ambition, administrative complexity, and uneven political will. Although less internationally scrutinized than Delhi or Mumbai, Kolkata has experienced significant evictions linked to metro construction, canal rehabilitation, and other urban upgrading projects. However, the literature on Kolkata remains comparatively thin, with a few notable exceptions (Bhan & Jana, 2013; Nagarik Mancha, 2014). This paper contributes to filling that gap by synthesizing dispersed sources, offering a grounded institutional analysis of how resettlement has unfolded in Kolkata's recent urban development trajectory. This literature review shows that displacement and resettlement must be understood not merely as side effects of infrastructure, but as deeply political and institutionalized processes. The next section presents a theoretical framework to analyze these dynamics through the combined lenses of institutional economics, urban governance, and political economy.

3. Theoretical Framework: Institutions, Urban Governance, and the Politics of Displacement

Understanding urban resettlement requires a theoretical framework that bridges the macro-structures of governance and the micro-level behavior of individuals and communities. This paper draws on three interrelated strands of theory—institutional economics, urban governance, and urban political economy—to conceptualize eviction and resettlement as dynamic, negotiated processes shaped by rules, power, and strategic action.

3.1 Institutions as Rules and Incentive Structures:
Institutional economics, particularly as developed by North (1990), provides a foundation for examining how rules—both formal and informal—structure human behavior and shape institutional outcomes. North defined institutions as the "rules of the game" in a society, encompassing laws, norms, and conventions that guide interaction. In the context of urban resettlement, these rules determine who is eligible for compensation, how land is valued, and what procedural protections are afforded to displaced populations. They also shape the behavior of bureaucrats, planners, and political actors who implement resettlement policies. Institutions, however, are not static. They evolve in response to changes in incentives, actor strategies, and feedback effects. Aoki (2001) argued that institutions are self-sustaining systems of shared beliefs and strategic expectations. When a critical mass of actors—such as displaced residents or local officials—alters its behavior, institutional arrangements may shift in response. For example, widespread resistance to eviction may lead to legal reforms, while administrative failure in managing rehabilitation may trigger bureaucratic restructuring. Such feedback loops are central to how urban resettlement regimes evolve over time.

3.2. Urban Governance: Fragmentation and Multi-Scalar Negotiation:
While institutional economics focuses on rules and incentives, urban governance literature highlights the multi-actor, multi-scalar nature of decision-making in contemporary cities. Governance refers not only to what the state does, but how decisions are made, who participates, and how power is distributed across institutions and levels of government (Pierre & Peters, 2000). In urban contexts, governance is often fragmented across municipal corporations, planning authorities, housing boards, and parastatal agencies. This institutional fragmentation creates gaps in accountability, coordination failures, and contradictory policy outcomes. In cities like Kolkata, resettlement decisions are not made by a single authority but are shaped by negotiations between state agencies (e.g., KMRC, KMDA, KMC), contractors, international funders, political parties, and affected communities. These interactions produce variable outcomes depending on the institutional capacity, political alignments, and the mobilizational strength of the displaced. The governance of resettlement is thus deeply contingent and relational, often resulting in inconsistent or uneven implementation. Governance literature also stresses the importance of participatory mechanisms and public accountability. While participatory planning is often promoted rhetorically, in practice, many resettlement schemes are top-down, opaque, and technocratic. The absence of meaningful engagement exacerbates the exclusion of vulnerable groups, including migrants, tenants, and women-headed households.

3.3. Urban Political Economy and the Production of Displacement:
The third strand of this framework draws on urban political economy, which situates resettlement within the larger political and economic structures that shape city-making. Scholars such as Harvey (2003) and Roy (2009) have argued that urban development under neoliberalism often prioritizes infrastructure, real estate, and private investment over social equity. Displacement, in this view, is not a byproduct but a structural feature of urban transformation. It enables land accumulation, facilitates capital flows, and reproduces class and spatial hierarchies.

In Kolkata, infrastructure projects like metro rail expansion or canal rehabilitation often serve dual purposes: they provide public utility while simultaneously making land available for commercial redevelopment. Eviction and resettlement are justified through discourses of modernization, environmental restoration, or flood mitigation, but their implementation disproportionately affects the poor, who occupy precarious or informal spaces. The political economy perspective helps explain why certain populations are displaced and others are protected, why compensation is often inadequate, and why resettlement sites are typically located on the urban periphery. It foregrounds questions of power: who decides, who benefits, and who bears the cost.

3. 4. Toward an Integrated Lens: Bringing these perspectives together allows for a multi-layered analysis of urban resettlement. Institutional economics clarifies how rules and incentives structure actor behavior and evolve over time. Urban governance theory highlights the fragmented, negotiated, and often exclusionary nature of decision-making. Political economy reveals the deeper structural logics—of capital, statecraft, and spatial control—that underpin displacement. This integrated lens enables us to analyze resettlement not as a singular policy failure or humanitarian challenge, but as a governance problem shaped by evolving institutional configurations and socio-political contestation. It also provides the tools to understand how communities adapt, resist, and negotiate within these institutional landscapes—and how their actions, in turn, may reshape governance outcomes.

4. Methodology and Case Selection: This paper employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in comparative case study analysis. Rather than conducting new fieldwork, it draws on a curated set of documented displacement and resettlement episodes in Kolkata—supported by published academic studies, policy reports, civil society documents, and news archives available prior to 2023. The aim is not to produce a comprehensive empirical survey but to critically analyze the institutional dynamics of eviction and resettlement, with a focus on the interplay between governance frameworks, community responses, and urban planning logics.

i. Case Selection Logic: The selection of case studies follows a purposive sampling strategy based on three interrelated criteria:

a) *Relevance to Major Infrastructure Projects:* Each case is linked to a large-scale urban infrastructure initiative—such as metro rail construction or environmental improvement— undertaken by state or parastatal agencies in Kolkata.
b) *Documented Displacement and Resettlement:* The chosen cases involve explicit instances of eviction, relocation, or resettlement, with accessible public documentation of the events and their governance trajectories.
c) *Variation in Institutional Configuration:* The selected projects involve different implementing bodies and administrative structures—such as the Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation (KMRC), the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP), and the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA)—allowing for comparative insights into institutional behavior.

Based on these criteria, three primary cases were selected for analysis. The first is the East-West Metro Project, with particular attention to the Bowbazar tunnel collapse and the resulting displacement and relocation crisis. The second case focuses on the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP), which involved canal rehabilitation and the eviction of long-established canal-side dwellers. The third includes selected episodes of eviction arising from slum clearance drives, beautification initiatives, and flood-control measures implemented along major infrastructure corridors. Together, these cases capture the multi-scalar, multi-agency governance of resettlement in Kolkata and highlight the complex social consequences of development-induced displacement in the city.

ii. Data Sources: The analysis draws on a combination of materials including peer-reviewed journal articles and academic book chapters from the fields of urban studies, planning, and governance. It also utilizes government documents and project reports—particularly those produced by the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP), the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), and the Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation (KMRC)—as well as relevant legal and policy frameworks such as the Land Acquisition Act and guidelines under BSUP/JNNURM. In addition, the study engages with civil society reports from organizations like Nagarik Mancha and incorporates insights from newspaper archives including The Telegraph, The Hindu, and The Indian Express. Published case studies and secondary literature from leading platforms such as Environment and Urbanization, Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), and academic volumes from Springer and Palgrave further substantiate the research. Wherever possible, multiple sources are cross-referenced to triangulate accounts of institutional action and community response. Given the bureaucratic opacity that often characterizes resettlement governance in Kolkata, this paper places particular emphasis on evidence generated through protest, community mobilization, and legal contestation, as these sources frequently expose the disjunctures within formal institutional narratives.

iii. Analytical Approach: The paper employs thematic analysis to interpret how institutions manage—or fail to manage—urban resettlement, and how affected communities strategize in response. Particular attention is paid to the design and implementation of relocation policies, the nature of institutional arrangements and the degree of coordination or fragmentation among involved agencies, and the rational behavior of displaced communities as they navigate incomplete or exclusionary governance systems. Additionally, the analysis considers the feedback mechanisms through which community actions influence policy adjustments and institutional change. By examining these thematic concerns across a range of cases, the paper seeks to uncover recurring patterns in institutional governance and contribute to a broader understanding of how displacement and resettlement are structured and contested in post-liberalization Indian cities.

5. Case Studies from Kolkata: This section presents three emblematic cases of eviction and resettlement in Kolkata, each linked to a major infrastructure initiative. These cases illustrate the uneven logics of urban transformation and highlight the governance dynamics, institutional responses, and community strategies that shape resettlement outcomes. Together, they demonstrate how displacement in Kolkata is negotiated across institutional boundaries, legal ambiguities, and citizen mobilization.

5.1 East-West Metro and the Bowbazar Crisis: The East-West Metro Corridor, a flagship infrastructure project in Kolkata, connects Salt Lake Sector V to Howrah via a 16.6-kilometer stretch, including a twin-bored tunnel under the Hooghly River. Envisioned as a high-capacity transit solution for the growing metropolis, the project has been executed by the Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation (KMRC), with technical and financial assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). While celebrated for its engineering ambition, the project has been marred by major episodes of displacement, most notably in the central neighborhood of Bowbazar. In August–September 2019, tunnel boring work beneath Bowbazar caused a sudden subsidence, leading to the collapse or structural damage of over 80 residential buildings. More than 600 people were evacuated overnight, many with little time to gather possessions. Most were housed temporarily in hotels and guesthouses at the expense of KMRC, while discussions over compensation and permanent rehabilitation dragged on for years. By late 2022, although temporary housing allowances continued, many families remained in limbo—uncompensated for property losses, and uncertain about whether they would be able to return to rebuilt homes or be relocated permanently. This crisis revealed critical weaknesses in Kolkata's institutional preparedness for managing displacement in high-density urban zones. While KMRC acted quickly to evacuate residents and

prevent fatalities, its longer-term response was bureaucratically fragmented and poorly coordinated. Multiple rounds of negotiation ensued between KMRC, local political representatives, affected residents, and government housing authorities, yet with no comprehensive resettlement policy in place, responses remained ad hoc. Residents' claims were complicated by tenure uncertainty, lack of formal documentation, and disputes over valuation. What makes the Bowbazar case particularly instructive is the nature of the displacement: it was not pre-planned but induced by technical failure, forcing a reactive institutional response. This underscores how institutional frameworks in Indian cities are ill-equipped to deal with unanticipated displacement, particularly in older, congested urban cores. Moreover, it reveals how communities exercise agency even under duress—organizing through resident associations, engaging the media, and lobbying local officials for fair compensation. These actions created public pressure that ultimately shaped KMRC's negotiation posture and delayed construction timelines. The Bowbazar episode also demonstrated the limits of techno-managerial planning in deeply inhabited cities. The prioritization of engineering solutions over social preparedness, and the reliance on temporary fixes rather than long-term rehabilitation plans, reflect a broader pattern of urban governance in which infrastructure development is decoupled from social impact management.

5.2. The Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP) and Canal Bank Displacement:
The Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP), initiated in the early 2000s with funding from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), aimed to upgrade drainage and sanitation infrastructure, desilt canals, and reduce flooding across large parts of the city. While framed as an environmentally beneficial intervention, KEIP also involved significant eviction of informal settlements along the canal banks, affecting thousands of low-income households. The project, coordinated by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and implemented by various contractors, represents a case of development-induced displacement carried out under the banner of environmental restoration. Under KEIP, canal banks were cleared in multiple phases. In neighborhoods such as Topsia, Tangra, and Narkeldanga, families who had lived for decades along these water bodies—often in precarious housing but with established social and economic networks—were served eviction notices and subsequently removed. According to civil society reports and documentation by Nagarik Mancha (2014), many residents were relocated to peripheral resettlement colonies such as Gitanjali and Ashoke Nagar under the Basic Services for the Urban Poor (BSUP) program of JNNURM. However, others received no formal rehabilitation, either due to their informal status, lack of documentation, or exclusion from beneficiary lists prepared by implementing agencies.

The resettlement sites, while offering pucca housing structures, were often located far from residents' former places of employment and lacked adequate transportation, schools, or health facilities. As observed in other Indian cities (e.g., Bhan & Jana, 2013), this spatial dislocation imposed long-term livelihood costs, particularly for casual laborers, domestic workers, and street vendors whose economic activity was embedded in the central city. Moreover, the implementation process was marked by institutional opacity, with residents frequently unaware of eligibility criteria or unable to navigate the bureaucratic maze of applications, documentation, and verification. The KEIP case highlights a familiar disjuncture between project objectives and social outcomes. While flood mitigation and canal renewal were achieved to some extent, the human cost of this environmental "improvement" was substantial. It also demonstrates how development projects justified as non-political can produce deeply political outcomes—determining whose presence is legitimized in the city and who is forcibly relocated. Although some residents adapted over time to new sites, others faced chronic underemployment, increased commuting costs, and reduced access to state services. Institutionally, KEIP operated in a fragmented governance landscape. While KMC was the nominal nodal agency, coordination with housing departments, land records offices, and local political intermediaries was inconsistent. This fragmentation

weakened accountability and undermined the potential for a rights-based or participatory model of resettlement. In the absence of clear entitlements, many evicted households relied on informal political networks or protest to secure housing, thus reinforcing clientelism over institutional transparency.

5.3. Other Infrastructure-Driven Displacements: Beautification and Clearance:
Beyond flagship projects like the Metro and KEIP, Kolkata has also seen displacement under a series of beautification, road-widening, and hazard reduction projects, many of which have occurred with limited documentation or policy oversight. In several cases, evictions were carried out by municipal authorities or state agencies citing public interest concerns such as traffic decongestion, riverbank restoration, or removal of "encroachments." One such instance occurred during the clearing of settlements along the Eastern Metropolitan (EM) Bypass, where families were evicted in phases for road expansion and flyover construction. While some received alternative housing under the BSUP or state schemes like Gitanjali, others were excluded. News reports and NGO documentation reveal that eligibility criteria were inconsistently applied, often excluding tenants, recent migrants, or families lacking updated ration cards or voter IDs. Another case involved the eviction of slum dwellers along the Adi Ganga canal, an ancient waterway that was cleaned and restored under urban environmental programs. Here too, displacement was justified in ecological terms, yet the resettlement process was poorly planned, with limited community engagement and delayed handover of flats. These cases illustrate several recurring features: absence of prior consultation, inadequate or delayed rehabilitation, and informal negotiations between evictees and political actors. In many instances, resettlement outcomes were determined less by formal planning protocols than by community protest, media attention, or the mediation of local leaders. This reinforces the notion that displacement in Kolkata is governed through a combination of state action, institutional omission, and negotiated adaptation.

6. Critical Analysis: Institutions, Agency, and the Politics of Relocation:
The preceding cases—ranging from metro tunneling disruptions in Bowbazar to canal-side evictions under KEIP and infrastructure-driven clearance along key transport corridors—reveal that urban displacement in Kolkata is not governed through coherent policy but emerges through fragmented, contested, and reactive institutional processes. This section identifies four key dimensions that explain why resettlement outcomes are often unjust, uneven, and contested, and how communities respond strategically within these constraints.

6.1. Institutional Fragmentation and Ambiguity:
A central theme across all case studies is the fragmented nature of institutional authority in Kolkata. Multiple agencies—KMRC, KMDA, KMC, the Housing Department, and line ministries—operate with overlapping or unclear mandates. This fragmentation leads to duplication, inaction, or contradictory responses. For instance, in the Bowbazar crisis, KMRC managed emergency relief, but long-term rehabilitation required coordination with housing authorities and local political actors—coordination that was slow and inconsistent. In KEIP, while KMC implemented canal cleaning, the rehabilitation of displaced families fell into an administrative grey zone, with no agency fully accountable for resettlement follow-up. Such fragmentation not only delays rehabilitation but also obscures lines of accountability, leaving affected households unsure of whom to approach. These institutional ambiguities produce high transaction costs for the displaced—measured in time, effort, and lost opportunity—as they navigate unclear eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, and uncertain timelines.

6.2. Rational Adaptation and Informal Negotiation:
Households facing eviction do not respond passively; instead, they adopt optimizing strategies in the face of uncertainty. Drawing from institutional economics (North, 1990; Aoki, 2001), we see that behavior under constraint is shaped by incentives and expectations. Some households accept suboptimal relocation, anticipating long-term tenure security. Others delay vacating, negotiate compensation,

or mobilize collectively, calculating that resistance may yield better outcomes. These decisions are rational within the institutional environment, even when they appear fragmented or informal to external observers. In many cases, informal negotiation with political intermediaries becomes the primary means of securing resettlement. Access to local councillors, party workers, or community brokers becomes more effective than navigating formal state channels. While this may help certain households, it reinforces patronage and undermines equitable access. Those without political leverage—especially migrants, tenants, or unregistered families—are often excluded from benefits.

6.3. Procedural Exclusion and Planning Without Participation:
Another structural weakness in Kolkata's resettlement governance is the lack of participatory planning. Displacement often occurs with little or no prior consultation. Residents typically receive short-notice eviction orders or, in cases like Bowbazar, are displaced abruptly due to structural failure. Although national policies like the JNNURM emphasized participatory frameworks, implementation remains top-down. Affected households are rarely involved in site selection, design, or service planning for resettlement colonies. This lack of participation results in misaligned rehabilitation, where new housing may be far from livelihood sources, lack basic services, or fail to reflect household needs. Consequently, some resettled families return to informal settlements or resort to renting out their allocated units. These outcomes reflect not individual failure but a deeper misfit between planning logics and lived urban realities.

6.4. Resistance and Feedback Loops in Institutional Change:
Despite institutional rigidities, some degree of institutional adaptation occurs—often catalyzed by community resistance. In Bowbazar, organized protests, media mobilization, and legal threats led KMRC to extend housing allowances and slow project timelines. Similarly, KEIP evictees in some wards negotiated more favorable relocation terms through local protest and party mediation. These feedback loops demonstrate that institutions are not static. When resistance accumulates and affects project timelines or political visibility, institutional actors may revise strategies—albeit often reactively. However, such revisions are typically incremental and localized rather than systemic. A larger transformation in institutional design—toward transparency, participation, and rights-based planning—remains absent.

7. Conclusion: Toward inclusive and accountable urban Transformation

Urban resettlement in Kolkata reflects the wider contradictions of contemporary urbanization in the Global South—where infrastructural ambition often coexists with institutional fragility, social exclusion, and contested citizenship. Through the case studies of the East-West Metro, the KEIP canal rehabilitation, and other infrastructure-led displacements, this paper has traced the contours of eviction and resettlement as more than spatial realignment—they are deeply political processes, governed by fractured institutions and negotiated by vulnerable populations under conditions of uncertainty.
Three core insights emerge from this analysis. First, displacement in Kolkata is governed through institutional fragmentation. Multiple agencies with overlapping mandates operate in silos, resulting in inconsistent implementation, delays in rehabilitation, and opaque accountability. This fragmentation produces bureaucratic gaps that displaced communities must navigate, often without clear information or support. Second, affected communities are not passive victims. Households and collectives adopt rational strategies—resisting, negotiating, or adapting—to secure improved outcomes. These strategies are informed by experience, expectation, and informal knowledge of political systems. While this adaptive behavior reflects agency, it also points to the absence of formal rights-based mechanisms for engagement and redress. Third, while moments of institutional responsiveness do occur—often in the face of resistance or public pressure—they tend to be reactive and limited in scope. Systemic institutional reform remains elusive, as displacement continues to be managed through ad hoc arrangements rather than

transparent and participatory frameworks. To move toward a more inclusive and accountable model of urban transformation, several governance reforms are essential. First, institutional roles must be clarified through inter-agency coordination protocols and unified resettlement policy frameworks that define responsibilities for each phase—eviction, compensation, relocation, and post-settlement support. Second, participatory mechanisms must be institutionalized from the outset of infrastructure planning, allowing communities to contribute to decisions about relocation sites, housing design, and service provision. Third, documentation systems must be updated to recognize a broader spectrum of urban informality, ensuring that renters, long-term migrants, and non-title holders are not arbitrarily excluded from rehabilitation. Additionally, the state must invest in post-relocation monitoring and livelihood restoration programs to ensure that displaced populations are not permanently impoverished. This includes guaranteed access to basic services, public transport, and employment support in resettlement sites. Ultimately, urban resettlement cannot be viewed merely as a logistical exercise. It is a governance challenge that implicates questions of equity, rights, and democratic accountability. For a city like Kolkata—where the past and future of infrastructure development intersect with a deeply rooted urban poor population—ensuring that resettlement is humane, inclusive, and just is not only a moral imperative but also a condition for sustainable urban development.

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