



REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR- 56332

Title: The Interplay of Urban Natural Capital and Livelihoods: A Study of Community Perceptions and Eco-Restoration Efforts along the Cooum River, Chennai.

Recommendation:

- Accept as it is
- Accept after minor revision**
- Accept after major revision
- Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity			✓	
Significance			✓	

Reviewer's Comment for Publication.

General Comments

This manuscript addresses a highly relevant and policy-sensitive issue: the socio-ecological consequences of urban river restoration projects, particularly forced resettlement and its impact on Natural Capital among the urban poor. The focus on the Cooum River Eco-Restoration Project in Chennai situates the study within a contemporary and important urban governance debate.

The paper demonstrates conceptual awareness (Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, IRR model) and presents primary survey data (n=373). The central argument—that spatial displacement constitutes a severe natural capital shock—is compelling and policy-relevant.

However, the manuscript requires moderate revisions before publication. The key issues relate to:

- Insufficient methodological clarity
- Limited statistical analysis
- Overinterpretation of descriptive data
- Structural redundancies
- Inconsistent academic tone

The study has strong potential but needs refinement to meet peer-reviewed journal standards.

Content and Originality

Strengths

1. Timely and Policy-Relevant Topic

The intersection of river restoration, displacement, and livelihood capital is highly relevant for Global South cities undergoing ecological redevelopment.

2. Innovative Framing of “Urban Natural Capital”

The conceptual move to frame *urban space/land* as a form of natural capital is insightful and theoretically valuable.

3. Important Empirical Insight

The prioritization of space (52%) over water (30%) among respondents is a

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meaningful finding that challenges restoration narratives focused solely on water quality.

4. **Integration of IRR and SL Frameworks**

The linking of Cernea's IRR model and the Sustainable Livelihoods framework strengthens the theoretical positioning.

Weaknesses

1. **Limited Novelty Beyond Case Context**

While the case is valuable, the manuscript does not sufficiently demonstrate how it advances broader urban political ecology or development displacement literature.

2. **Conceptual Ambiguity**

The definition of Natural Capital in urban settings could be sharpened. Urban land/space is treated as natural capital, but the ecological distinction between built and natural assets needs clearer theoretical justification.

3. **Overstatement of "Irrefutable Evidence"**

Claims such as "irrefutable evidence" are too strong given the descriptive nature of the data.

Technical Quality

1. **Methodology**

The methodology section is weak and needs expansion.

Missing details include:

- Sampling strategy (random? purposive? cluster?)
- Location of resettlement sites
- Timing (post- or pre-resettlement?)
- Survey instrument design
- Reliability/validity testing
- Ethical clearance

Without these, the credibility of findings is weakened.

2. **Data Analysis**

The analysis is primarily descriptive (frequencies and percentages). There is no:

- Cross-tabulation
- Regression analysis
- Comparative group analysis
- Gender or occupation-based differentiation

Given n=373, more rigorous statistical analysis is expected.

For example:

- Are land concerns higher among livestock-owning households?
- Are participation rates associated with tenure security?
- Does gender influence environmental participation?

These would significantly strengthen the paper.

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3. Interpretation

The interpretation that low tree plantation participation reflects “psychological disconnect” is plausible but speculative. This requires either:

- Supporting qualitative evidence
- Literature backing
- Or cautious phrasing

Currently, some interpretations extend beyond what the data strictly supports.

Language and Presentation

Strengths

- Clear articulation of argument in several sections.
- Policy recommendations are structured and organized by stakeholder.

Areas for Improvement

1. Repetition between sections 4 and conclusion.
2. Occasional informal or strong wording:
 - “irrefutable evidence”
 - “crisis”
 - “fundamental disconnect”
3. Minor grammatical inconsistencies.
4. Tables could be formatted more professionally.
5. Some headings are redundant or unevenly formatted.

Overall, language quality is acceptable but needs polishing for academic tone consistency.

Structure and Organization

Strengths

- Logical progression: Introduction → Theory → Data → Interpretation → Recommendations.
- Strong policy-oriented recommendations.
- Stakeholder-based structuring of suggestions is commendable.

Weaknesses

1. The theoretical framework could precede research objectives more clearly.
2. Results and discussion overlap substantially.
3. Recommendations section is very long relative to analysis.
4. The conclusion repeats findings rather than synthesizing theoretical contribution.

Consider separating:

- Results (data presentation)
- Discussion (theoretical integration)

References and Citations

Strengths

- Includes key livelihood and displacement theory (Chambers & Conway; Cernea).
- Includes contemporary urban river restoration literature (2024–2025 sources).

Concerns

1. Several references appear to be:
 - In press (2025)
 - Possibly unpublished (ResearchGate listing)

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- Magazine source (Undark Magazine – journalistic, not peer-reviewed)
- 2. Limited engagement with:
 - Urban political ecology literature
 - Displacement studies in Indian cities
 - Chennai-specific resettlement scholarship
- 3. Citation formatting inconsistencies.

The theoretical depth would benefit from inclusion of:

- Urban political ecology scholars
- Indian urban resettlement case studies
- Environmental justice literature

Overall Recommendation

This manuscript addresses an important and underexplored dimension of urban ecological restoration—livelihood capital shock through spatial displacement. The empirical finding that land/space is prioritized over water is significant and policy-relevant.

However, to reach publishable quality, the manuscript requires:

1. Expanded and clarified methodology
2. More rigorous statistical analysis
3. Reduced interpretive overreach
4. Strengthened theoretical integration
5. More peer-reviewed references
6. Structural tightening

Final Decision:

Minor to moderate Revision

Required Revisions Summary

- Expand methodology (sampling, instrument, ethics).
- Add inferential or comparative statistical analysis.
- Moderate strong language claims.
- Strengthen theoretical positioning within urban political ecology.
- Reduce redundancy in discussion.
- Improve citation quality and consistency.
- Clarify whether data is pre- or post-resettlement.