

Development induced displacement in the north-east India and the R & R policy

Development induced displacement is movement of people who are compelled to migrate as a result of policies and projects which are implemented supposedly enhance 'development'. Large-scale infrastructure projects which include dams, roads, ports, airports; urban clearance initiatives; mining and deforestation; and the introduction of conservation parks/reserves and biosphere projects usually involve displacing and dislocating the original inhabitants for the so called larger cause.

The people who suffer as a result of this usually remain internally displaced. In spite of being resettled they are not given their due compensation. "While there are guidelines on restoration for affected populations produced by some major donors to these types of projects, such as the World Bank, there continues to be inadequate access to compensation. This tends to be the responsibility of host governments, and interventions from outside are often deemed inappropriate."ⁱ

In India displacement due to development projects have become a common occurrence. The poor and the marginalised people have to bear the brunt of these mega projects. India is one of the major dam constructing nations and has built more than 4000 dams since independence. Dams were also referred to as "Temples of Modern India" by late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Out of the total population of indigenous/ tribal peoples, 55 % has been displaced who constituted only 8 % of the total population of India at 1991 census. That precisely means 85 lakhs of tribal people were displaced till 1990 according to the data given by Ministry of Tribal Affairs for mega development projects. ⁱⁱIn India dams are the single cause for displacing around 75% of total number of displaced people. (Fernandes and Paranjpye , 1997). The reason for this being, such projects are usually undertaken in the remote areas of the country, which are inhabited by the tribals. The tribal people follow an indigenous and tradition pattern of life and thus dislocating them from their land would eventually lead to massive impoverishment due to loss of their home , livelihood and habitat. (Lama)ⁱⁱⁱ

Thus dams among other mega development initiative have always been at the centre of controversy in India. However till the last century these dams were mostly concentrated in the northern, central and southern part of India. However the last decade saw a massive uproar in the north eastern part of the country. The issue again was mega dams. The issue of dam proliferation in north east India started way back in 2001 when Central Electric Authority [CEA] in its preliminary Ranking study of the nation-wide potential for hydroelectricity gave the highest marks to the Brahmaputra river basin. The Brahmaputra river system includes Barak and other south flowing rivers like Teesta, Subansiri, Kameng, Kalang, Dihang, Dibang and Lohit. The Brahmaputra is one of the world's largest rivers, with a river basin of 580,000 sq.km, 33% of which is in India. (Goswami and Das, 2003). This region has been referred to as the "future powerhouse" of India and the state of Arunachal Pradesh has been identified as the major contributor of hydel energy according to the Central Electric Authority report. The assessed power potential of north east India is 63,257 MW which is just a little less than half, 43 % of total assessed hydro power potential of the country. The 50.000 MW hydel

power initiatives by Ministry of Power in 2003 has also focussed on northeast india.168 dams which are coming up in this area would greatly alter the river-scape of this region and hence has been an issue of great concern in the past decade. The government and the proponents of large dams in this area are of the opinion that these dams would facilitate the development of the north-eastern states. (Menon, Vaghlikar, Kohli and Fernandes, 2003).

TOPOGRAPHICAL UNFEASIBILITY

The geographical location of this area is extremely unfavourable for this kind of “development” activity of construction of dams as it lies in seismic zone-5. Seismic zone 5 lies between 20°N-30°N and 89°E-94°E. Seismic zone 5 means seismically very active. The high seismicity in the region is attributed to the collision tectonics between the Indian plate and the Eurasian plate in the north and subduction tectonics along the Indo-Myanmar range in the east. The dam site of Teestain Chungtang village faced a major earthquake in 2011 in which many people died. Moreover reservoir induced seismicity has also been scientifically proven in case of large dams due to extra water pressure exerted in vents and fissures near and under the reservoir. Overall there are over 100 identified cases of earthquakes that scientists believe were triggered by reservoirs (Gupta, 2002) the most serious case may be the 7.9-magnitude Sichuan earthquake in May 2008, which killed an estimated 80,000 people .It, occurred due to the construction of the Zipingpu Dam. The last two major earthquakes in northeast in 1897 and 1950 caused landslides which blocked rivers and formed temporary dams which when burst caused flash floods. Besides, in this are there is a presence of glacial lakes which at times burst and causes sudden increase in water flow in the river. Thus the slightest tampering with the environment in this highly volatile geo-dynamic terrain can cause widespread havoc. When a dam is suddenly cracked a large amount of water is spills out creating a flood wave which would have detrimental downstream effect. In the year 1975 the failure of the Banqiao Reservoir Dam and other dams in Henan Province, China caused deaths than any other dam failure in history. The disaster killed an estimated 171,000 people and 11 million people lost their homes.^{iv}

The cost benefit analysis is a rather crude way for justifying the viability of such projects which causes such mass displacement. The effect on human lives is highly detrimental and involves effects at various levels.

EFFECTS ON HUMAN LIVES

- LOSS OF LIVELIHOOD

Displacement destroys the two most important aspects of their life that is common natural resources and community. This area is home to various indigenous groups .Many of these groups like the IduMishmi, Lepcha would be grossly affected due to displacement and loss of livelihood. Arunachal Pradesh being a hilly terrain has very little land where permanent agriculture can be done. The submergence area of Lower Subansiri projects extend up to 70 km upstream along the main river and also to some extent through its tributaries Kamala and Sil .Almost all arable land will be lost after the completion of the project. The Shifting agriculture (jhum) is a dominant traditional land use in the hills of Northeast India and plays a critical role in the livelihoods of people, maintaining agricultural biodiversity and providing food security. Increasing pressures on land have resulted in

the shortening of jhum cycles (the length of the fallow period between two cropping phases), thus impacting the ecological viability of this farming system. The submergence of land by hydel projects will further shorten the jhum cycle and enhance the pressure on the surrounding areas, thus affecting the environment and the livelihoods of jhum dependent communities. Common property resources includes grazing, ediblefruits, vegetables, timber, fishesetc. which the communities lose after being displaced. (Vagholikar and Das, 2010)

- **LOSS OF CULTURE**

Besides livelihood many of these indigenous groups are sceptical about losing their cultural and ethnic tradition after being displaced. In Sikkim the Lepcha tribe is opposing the construction on Dzongu, a sacred site. Tipaimukh hydroelectric dam in Manipur, where the Zeliangrong Nagas inhabit, also stand to lose their sacred spots and half of their fertile hills. (Chakraborty, 2003)

- **INFLUX OF LABOUR**

Another area of major concern for these tribal groups is the migration of labour population from outside as these hydel projects need skilled as well as unskilled labourers. The presence of large number of people in a region for a prolonged period of time can affect the demographic profile of that area. Although employment generation is portrayed as one of the benefits of such projects from similar projects in past one can say that local people are rarely employed in the skilled, semiskilled or unskilled section. (Vagholikar and Das, 2010)

- **OTHER DOWNSTREAM EFFECTS**

Moreover the downstream negative impacts of these big dams are also quite a few in numbers. The construction of the dams will reduce water flows which will mean less fishing stocks in the rivers for fishermen and less water for farmers to irrigate their crops. Dam reservoirs will need to be filled to a certain level throughout the year; there will be much less water downstream during the dry season and major flooding during the monsoon season, when water is released from reservoirs. Concerns include loss of fisheries, changes in wetland ecology in the flood plains, impacts on agriculture on the riverine islands and tracts, impacts on various other livelihoods like driftwood collection, sand and gravel mining due to blockage of rivers by dams.

- **EFFECTS ON PUBLIC HEALTH**

Besides these socio-economic impacts studies show that stagnant water in dams have been catalyst in spreading diseases like malaria ,dysentery ,diarrhoea in case of Hirakund dam (Mahapatra ,1999)

R AND R POLICY

Cernea (1998) proposes a 'risks and reconstruction' model of rehabilitation. He states that 'targeted measures – economic, technical, legal and cultural – must be undertaken to orient from the outset the planning of resettlement towards the reconstruction of livelihood, so as to prevent impoverishment'.

In mega projects that causes displacement 'the people who will be displaced are subjected to huge risks, typically without their knowledge, participation or consent' [Cernea 1998:43–44]. He identifies

the risks as follows: 'landlessness; joblessness; homelessness; marginalization; increased morbidity and mortality; food insecurity; loss of access to common property and services; and community disarticulation' [Cernea 1998:47].

His hypothesis is that the state can reverse the risks by the following reconstructive actions:

- From landlessness to land-based resettlement;
- From joblessness to re-employment;
- From food insecurity to safe nutrition;
- From homelessness to house reconstruction;
- From increased morbidity to better health care;
- From social disarticulation, marginalization and deprivation of common assets, to community reconstruction and social inclusion. [Cernea 1998:47]

However in most cases these recommendations are not followed. Till 2003 some States, companies and projects had their policies or packages but India did not have a national policy." [Fernandes]. The National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007 says "acquisition of private property, leading to involuntary displacement of people" often have adverse effect on the people affected. Hence the policy ensures that the people concerned get their due compensations beyond monetary benefits. However in most of the cases of such development projects the compensation is often not adequate or beneficial in real terms as it takes a generalised approach and fails to take into account area or project specific action. Another aspect of such policy is it is not always inclusive, as in everyone facing The National R and R policy 2007 states that "Each affected family owning agricultural land in the affected area and whose entire land has been acquired or lost, may be allotted in the name of the khatedar(s)in the affected family, agricultural land or cultivable wasteland to the extent of actual land loss by the khatedar(s)in the affected family subject to a maximum of 9 hectare of irrigated land or two hectares of un-irrigated land or cultivable "wasteland, if Government land is available in the resettlement area. This benefit shall also be available to the affected families who have, as a consequence of the acquisition "or loss of land, been reduced to the status of marginal farmers."

Displacement like these inevitably lead to alienation from commonly owned resources like forest, water bodies and fodder. Resources accessible to and collectively owned\held\managed by an identifiable community and on which no individual has exclusive property rights are called common property resources. These common properties are without any legal "patta". A legal patta is a revenue record that entitles a person the "legal right" to use the property. Legal system doesn't protect the common property rights of people. According to the National Sample Survey Organisation's 54th Round data on CPRs, published in 1999, CPR land is declining by around 2% every year. This leads to a loss of 166,660 hectares yearly.^v

In North east India this practise of owning common property is reflected also in their customary laws and land management systems. "Some traditions like those of the Angami of Nagaland and the Dimasa of Assam combined individual with community ownership while others like the Aka of

Arunachal Pradesh lacked the very concept of individual ownership. Amid this diversity, common to all the tribes is the centrality of the community on which was based the customary laws that governed even individual ownership. Its owner could transfer the land only to specific persons determined by this law. A system based on a written document and a land classification that is different from theirs was imposed on their tradition based on the word of mouth and recognition by the community. No effort was made to integrate these two systems. The contradiction that the imposition of the individual-based land laws causes is basic to land alienation." [Barbora and Fernandes, 2008]^{vi}

However the issue which is of concern is the privatisation on common property which is not included within the frame work of the policy detrimental effect is not included under the rehabilitation and resettlement plan. The people who are dependent upon CPR often not even counted among the displaced. According to the law they reside on State property. "In the Northeast the CPRs are recognised only in Nagaland and Mizoram states that are governed according to their tribal customary law under Articles 371A and 371G respectively. The whole of Meghalaya and the North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam come under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. It accords partial recognition to the CPRs. In Arunachal Pradesh, the tribals who are around 64 percent of the population, run their civil affairs according to their community ownership based customary law, but it is not recognised according to the individual ownership based Indian land laws. The State has only some administrative rules going back to the British age." Thus the Law doesn't give them compensation even if they are displaced due to mega projects. [Menon, 2008]. Although Arunachal Pradesh have a separate R and R policy as per the Memorandum of Agreement between NHPC and Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, as the later in a hill state with difficult terrain. Although it recognizes customary law and common tribal land and as a result compensates in terms of money yet the importance of CPR and the essence of it is lost.

Moreover Women are relatively more dependent on CPRs, hence losing of these resources affect the women more. In commonly owned resources women had control over the resources and hence had decision making power in family economy. The loss of CPRs involves either landlessness or a paradigm shift in mode of ownership that is individual rights. When the common property resources are lost and tribes have to adapt to a system of individual ownership men are in charge of production and decision making. Women invariably suffer the most in such cases. [Fernandes, 2008]

Another dam built on similar terrain and on similar type of commonly owned property is that of the Tehri Dam in Uttarakhand. In the case of Tehri dam the Rehabilitation Plan has been broadly divided into two broad segments, viz. Rural Rehabilitation and Urban Rehabilitation. Affected families under Rural Rehabilitation are categorised as "Fully affected" or "Partially affected". The families who are losing 50% or more land are treated as Fully Affected" (Sharma). "Moreover any community property that will be affected by the project will be replaced by THDC before the demolition or acquisition of such properties. In case of grazing land and van panchayat land, THDC will provide access roads to the residual van panchayat and / or grazing land." The urban rehabilitation helped 5300 families resettle at new Tehri town with modern facilities. Moreover Tehri dam was built for other purposes as well along with hydroelectricity generation like irrigation, drinking water etc.

The compensation packages were definitely better than the present national policy as it was before the year 2003, the year in which a national R and R policy came into existence. One benefit of the

THDC policy was it took into account the situation of that particular area into account while planning the compensation packages.

Hence compensation packages of the R and R policy should be area specific as well and take into account the short term as well as the long term goals .R and R policy presently ignores the gender roles and issues arising out of loss of CPR as well when it denies legal acknowledgement to common ownership.

NEW NATIONAL R and R Policy [DRAFT]

The Draft of the new Bill states that “The issue of who acquires land is less important than the process of land acquisition; compensation for land acquired and R&R process, package and conditions ... The objective is to make the process of land acquisition easy, transparent, and fair for both sides in each instance ...”

This Bill would lead to acquiring of land, including commons, presently in the hands of small and marginal farmers from tribal, SC and backward communities for so called ‘public purpose’ for “infrastructure development”. In urban areas it would result in real estate development instead of government housing estates for the urban poor. “The government is fast-tracking into a future which facilitates transfer of land into the hands of the urban elite. Even if there is a caveat placed on R&R in case of acquisition up to 100 acres, there is no mechanism to stop the rich from taking an easy way out, opting for say 90 acres. Does that not call for R&R?” [Maheshewari, 2011]

GROUND PROTESTS

On December 1st, around 3000 activists led by AASU and KMSS filled the Lakhimpur town to block the further movement of an equipment-carrying 14 wheel jumbo carrier towards the Subansiri dam site. One month of full scale protests and an effective blockade against NHPC in Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts have given birth to a regional movement.

In April 2012, Adi-Galo community members took their traditional oaths to oppose the 2,700MW Lower Siang hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh.

While addressing an anti-dam protest rally organized against the Lower Subansiri HEP in the month of November ,2012, the leader of Narmada Bachao Andolan , Medha Patkar said, “It is not only a fight against NHPC but against all the big dams coming up in the country.”

She also added that, “Big dams are taken up to indulge in corruption by the government and the multinational companies, who exploit the resources for their maximum benefit ignoring the impact of these projects on common people.”

However polarized media coverage of these protests is another issue. They cover the large-scale public protest but don’t give importance to the construction, engineering and negative impacts of the dams. (Das, 2012)

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A key feature in the current environmental clearance is the environmental impact assessment. The constitution says that major development, infrastructural and industrial projects require an EIA, which must include a detailed survey and investigation — including environmental, social and economic repercussions. All project proposals are examined by the Ministry of Environment and Forest in the light of legislation such as Environment Act of 1986, Forest Act of 1980, Water Act of 1974 etc. The main issue of concern is The Lower Subansiri Hydel-Project is also expected to drown 3,500 ha of pristine forest, part of a rich biodiversity hotspot but the reports doesn't mention it. The EIA report says that the Lower Subansiri project would displace only 38 families .However it doesn't take into account the number of families affected indirectly by the loss of livelihood. In the case of the Ranganadi hydel project the downstream impacts were not included in the report. It was found that "The impact of sedimentation was visible almost 100 km. downstream of the dam in the form of a decrease in fish population, which has affected the fishing community" (Menon .2009). The impact of dams under common property rights are also not there in the reports although it is crucial to the livelihood of the communities being displaced. The problem of deforestation would be supplemented by a policy of afforestation or reforestation .For example a considerable part of forests in Arunachal Pradesh is classified as "unclassified state forest" which is under control of indigenous communities .Thus bringing such areas under "compulsory afforestation"would result in declaring them as protected or reserved areas with more state control. The impact on indigenous communities with respect to Scheduled Tribes and other Forest Dwellers Act, 2006 needs to be addressed in this case. These EIA reports are mostly manipulated and used as an exercise in compliance with commerce and not environment. These EIA's are not done to assess the environmental and social cost, but to make a list of flora and fauna and thereafter offer the green signal for these large projects. (Vagholikar and Ahmed, 2003)

MYTHS ABOUT LARGE DAMS

- **HYDEL ENERGY BEING A CLEAN ENERGY**

The argument that harnessing hydel power is beneficial for the environment is also been found to be wrong as storage of large amount of water has been found to emit greenhouse gases like methane .Hence UNFCCC has removed large dams from its Clean Development Mechanism. Vincent St Louis, of the University of Alberta, has made the first ever calculation of the total contribution of the thousands of reservoirs round the world to global warming. In the September issue of the journal Bioscience, he says that they produce a fifth of all the man-made methane in the atmosphere. Add in their emissions of carbon dioxide, and they make up 7 per cent of the man-made greenhouse effect. That is a bigger impact than, for instance, aircraft emissions. (Pearce, 2000)

- **LARGE DAMS CONTROL FLOOD**

One of the method used for 'controlling' floods are the construction of dams. Embankments, dams and other similar devices are referred to as 'structural controls'. Incidents in the past have shown us how ineffective dams are for controlling floods. (Goldsmith and Hyldyard, 1984). In the case of small scale flood these dams may help to control it, however it case of floods of higher magnitude the

dams may create havoc .The disastrous floods of MahanadiRiver in Orissa have been caused due to Hirakund dam in 2008.

CONCLUSION

The power generated from these projects is going to the mainland for sure as it is more than what north east needs. Thus it is obvious that the poor and the marginalised people have to suffer for something that is not going to benefit them anyway

Tribal people have suffered disproportionately from the effects of construction of dams on their land but the potential benefits hardly reach them. Machkunda dam in Orissa generates 720 MW per year but it doesn't reach the families displaced due to this project and most of these families are living without electricity. (Sainath, 1996).The resettlement and rehabilitation process of the government has been pretty bad in the past. Most of it has only somewhat focussed on the short run and ignored the long run issues. As India is witnessing several resistance movements against dams in various parts of India, north-eastern region is an easy catch because of its strategic location, vast potential for power generation and relatively low level of population density in comparison to other parts of India. (Gogoi, 2011.) This form of development activity can be compared to the way the developed countries helped the colonized countries to boost their production of unfinished goods for raw materials .Since India never got a chance to colonize it is exploiting north east India by imperialism. To meet the needs of the corporate sector and the consuming classes, the Indian government has encouraged a new demand for resources in the tribal areas of central India and in the North-east. These regions are on the verge of becoming our 'internal colonies', as a wave of mining and hydroelectric schemes undermine local ecologies, and disrupt and displace local communities. The dam-building in the North-east is creating a further wave of discontent among the people as this part of the country has been neglected and exploited for a long time . (Guha , 2012)

In brief development should be done in way which is sustainable and people sensitive. An approach which brings development analogous to environment .It should also give importance to the problems faced by the people affected. "Therefore the linking of local needs with nation building needs a more amicable cooperative federal approach rather than absolutist central approach." The country and the individual states could also consider cheaper and more effective energy options that are harnessed or obtained without affecting environment including human population .(Gogoi 2011)

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