

Impact of Development-Induced Displacement on Women

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Abstract

Development projects are very often linked with the problem of displacement. The development projects of North-East region have directly affected the poor powerless tribal both in the hills and plains. Absence of adequate resettlement and rehabilitation policy for the displaced has led to further pauperisation marginalization and helplessness among oustees. The study has made an attempt to find out the development-induced displacement in North-East India in general and Assam in particular. The main focus is on its impact on displaced persons particularly on displaced women. The sources of data are secondary one. The secondary data are collected from articles, seminars papers, books and news reports published in different news papers.

Keywords : Displacement, Internally displaced person, Project affected people, Resettlement, Rehabilitation.

Introduction :

One of the major challenges of today is the growth of the number of internally displaced person(IDPs) worldwide. While there are no official definition of an internally displaced person, the guiding principles on 'Internal Displacement' set by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees(UNHCR) holds internally displaced persons to be 'persons who have been forced to be flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residences on a result of armed conflict, internal strife and habitual violence of human rights as well as natural or manmade disasters

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involving one or more of these elements and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border.

Internally displaced persons constitute one of the largest excluded groups in the society. Displacement from ones home and habitat is a very pathetic because when the displaces move from their original habitats, they incur immense losses in life sustaining resources including social networks, neighbours and access to common property resources. Moreover the plight or status of the internally displaced women are even worse than man. As women are largely engaged in informal sector- gathering forest produce, working in the fields or selling produce, dislocation can result in loss of livelihood, adding to women's economic hardship. Poverty increases and opportunities shrink. This undermines reproductive health too, given the fact that an estimated twenty five percent of displaced women of reproductive age are at any one time. (Bhasker U. Rau, 1967)

Understanding Development-Induced Displacement :

Development-induced displacement linked to development. According to Alf Morten Jerve development induced displacement could caused by government decision to acquire land for implementation of public project; or state decision to change the use of land owed or claimed by itself; or changes in the use of the land owned by state agencies; or not complete change of ownership but introduction of new restrictions on current use of land; or indirect impact areas like population, erosion, etc.(Alf Morten Jerve,1999; Hugo Stoke and Arne Tostensen 1999)

Displacement refers not only to those who are forced to physically relocate in order to make way for project and its related aspects but also includes those who are displaced from their resource base and livelihoods. It is commonly experienced through the loss of land and the disruption of social and economic relationship.(Bortolome, 1999)

Development induced displaced people are persons or a group of persons who are forced to leave their lands or homes or their possession as a result of a development process which undermines or excludes project

affected people(PAP) who include the landless, the non-asset class, the seasonal farmers, the fishermen, boatmen, those engaged in work of art, culture and handicraft, and small shopkeepers in the affected village (Renu Modi, 2004).

Another synonymous term used for the PAP and displaced person is 'oustees'. It includes not only the owners of land in question, but also those "carrying on any trade, occupation or calling or working for gain in the area likely to be submerged temporarily" (Renu Modi, 2004)

In India, it was estimated that more than 25 million persons have been displaced since 1950 on account of development projects. Less than fifty per cent of them have been rehabilitated. The rest were pauperized in the process of development of which 40 per cent were tribals (Jain, 2001).

The development projects of North-east region have directly affected the poor and powerless tribal both in the hills and plains. Absence of adequate resettlement and rehabilitation policy for the displaced has led to further pauperisation, marginalization and helplessness among the oustees. Among the North-eastern states, development induced IDPs are more visible in Assam. The oil sector in Assam also contributed towards the problem of displacement. New oil townships are established in various places of upper and lower Assam displacing the inhabitants of these areas. It is difficult to find exact amount of land acquisition for the oil sector in Assam. From official sources the state government acquired for establishing Bogaingaon Petrochemical complex limited(BRPL) 565 acres private land and 5,435 acres Common Property Resource land (CPR), 269 acres of private land and 481 acres of CPR land for Numaligarh Refinery, 4,000 acres of land for Noonmati Refinery (Baruah, 1999:20). Two paper mills of Assam at Jagiraod and Cacher have also forced people out of their homes, displaced large number of tribals particularly the Lalung, Tiwa and Karbi tribes. Moreover urban expansion of Guwahati city displaced the tribes mostly belonging to Karbis and Bodos. Urban expansion is pushing these people out of the city periphery without proper rehabilitation.

The Pagladiya Dam Project is to be constructed in Nalbari District of Lower Assam. The Project is going to irrigate 54,125 hectares of land from flood and erosion and generate only 3MH of electricity. But it would displace almost 1,05,000 population most of whom are tribal people. For construction of the fourth bridge over the mighty Brahmaputra 'The Bogibeel Bridge' already more than 2000 bighas of land have been occupied. According to an estimated almost 500 families having ownership documents of these lands are not compensated yet.

The 200 MW Lower Subansiri Project to be constructed on the border areas of Assam and Arunachal is already facing a lot of opposition from the people. The proposed height of the dam is 116 meters and it will submerge 3436 hectares of land. At the same time more than 1 lakh people of Arunachal and Assam will be adversely affected by the dam, out of which about 15,000 face the threat of physical displacement. There is large scale displacement due to mining, though it is a gradual process. According to a news item (The Sentinels, October 12, 2007), the North-east has 395 million tonnes of coal deposits apart from Uranium, Petroleum, Limestone and other minerals.

The centre provided it legal backing through the Highways Act 1998, the SEZ Act 2005 and the attempt to change the 5th Schedule 2001 to make acquisition of land easier. Most states too have introduced legal changes to suit this purpose. Thus, there will be more displacement than in the last 60 years, much of the tribal for mining in India and dams in the North-east (IWGIA:2004 P. 314). The fact that 80% of internally displaced persons are from among the rural poor may explain also poor resettlement. Its result is impoverishment that begins with landlessness. For example, landlessness among the Assam development-induced persons grew from 15.56% before the project to 24.38% after it. (Fernandes and Bharali:2006 p.188). Also the cultivated areas decline. In Assam from an average of 3.04 acres per family to 1.45 acres. In other words the development-induced displaced persons experience a downward mobility in their cultivator status. Most big farmers become medium, the medium farmers

become small and marginal and small farmers become landless. Many of them own only homestead land. Also support mechanisms such as the number of ponds, Wells, poultry, cattle and draft animals that supplement agricultural income decline (Bharali, 2007).

Impact of Development-Induced Displacement :

Development projects cause socio-economic displacement such as, inducing poverty, forcing the poor and the moderately poor to the lowest level, increasing morbidity levels. Most development projects induce displacement of people from their traditional habitats. Cernea (1999) formulated the 'Impoverishment Risk and Reconstruction Model (IRR)' which are :

Landlessness, Joblessness, Homelessness, Marginalization, Food insecurity, Increased morbidity and mortality, Loss of access to common property, social disintegration.

Development induced displacement has a gender dimension. The whole family suffers the impact of joblessness, reduction in income and of the move below the poverty line. While the access of the whole family declines, that of women declines more than that of men. If the project gives jobs, except in women headed families they go almost exclusively to men considered head of families. If they are rehabilitated, land is allotted to men. So domestic power passes full to the men and from him to his son.(Thekkekara Stan,1993)

As a result, after displacement joblessness is higher among women than men. It reduces women to being house-wives also depending on man's single salary. But most of the men spend a part of their salary on alcohol. One of the result is rise in domestic violence(Fernandes and Raj:1992 p.153-154). A study carried out by National Commission for Women in India, on the impact of displacement on women reveals that violence against women and alcoholism are the direct outcome of development induced displacement in India. Displacement made men feel helpless and turned women and children scapegoat (TISS, 1993).

Moreover, forced displacement is a traumatic experience. The elderly, women and children are vulnerable to mental health problems associated with dislocation. It is generally recognized that serious change in immediate physical and social environment is particularly risky for elders, that it may trigger episodes cognitive disorientation that appears as dementia (Byron. J. Good, 1996)

Besides the project changes the economy of a village drastically. Village women who were used to a better economy in which they played an important role have now to compete with the salaried class to buy food in the market with no control over its price. The combination of landlessness, joblessness and lack of exposure to the market economy reduces their access to food. Already before displacement, women did not have full rights over land and forests. But as long as they were community resources, they had some control over it. Displacement deprives them of this control and leaves them with very few resources to take its place. Malnutrition is one of its consequences (Bhanumathi, 2002 pp, 21-22)

The next step is joblessness that takes two forms, the first is lack of access to work and the second is downward occupational mobility. Lower access to work is the first form that the resultant joblessness takes. In Assam 50% became daily wage unskilled workers. (Fernandes and Bharali, 2006, p,188) All feel the impact of the consequent impoverishment but women and children feel it more than other do. The lower the social stratum they belong to, the greater the impact. It takes the form of higher joblessness; greater malnutrition deterioration in their social status. For example 56% of displaced families in Assam pulled their children out of school to turn them into child labourers.

Sanitation is a major problem specific to the displaced women. But since this problem peculiar to women, it seldom draws attention. Moreover collection of water is almost always a woman's responsibility. Taking over of water source by dams, or water pollution by 'development' projects, affect women's lives the most.

The transition period between actual displacement and resettlement is a difficult phase, in which, again, women suffer somewhat more. In the absence of sensitive handling and supportive atmosphere, the oustees found it difficult to shift to new site. Many, therefore, continue to maintain two homes-one of the submerging village and the other in the resettlement, resulting in fracturing of families. Most often, it is the women, the old and the children who left behind. Moreover, it has been seen that whenever there is unemployment, i.e. jobs are scares, the first ones to lose are the women. This is not because they lack the skill, but more because they have to make way for the men.

Suggestions and Conclusion :

The study is an attempt at understanding development induced displacement which has affected mostly the weaker sections of society. In the name of development the state snatched land and livelihood from a large section of people, mostly marginalized and tribals. With displacement, two terms are interrelated, i.e. rehabilitation and resettlement. While resettlement is the physical implantation in a new colony, rehabilitation is total re-establishment of lost livelihood, i.e. recreation of physical, social and cultural environment required for a new life with dignity. The U.N Human Rights Guidelines on Development based Displacement(1997) affirms "All persons, groups and communities have the right to alternative land or housing which includes the right to alternative land or housing which is safe, secure, accessible, affordable and habitable."

In general, there is a gender disparities in resettlement operation. For example, compensation payments are usually paid to the heads of households, male hands, leaving women and children at higher risk of deprivation.

Based on the conclusion arrived at by the study, the following are the suggestions:

- ❖ The study suggests that efforts to be made to minimize the displacement as it is resulting in impoverishment of project affected people.

- ❖ Minimize the time gap between displacement and resettlement.
- ❖ Full compensation to the Common Property Resources(CPR) has to be paid.
- ❖ There must be vocational training programmes for women to improve their employability in the project.
- ❖ Compensation package should include affected women.
- ❖ Counseling programmes should be organized by government agencies as well as NGOs for displaced women.
- ❖ Not the least, further research should be made on this neglected area.

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