An Insight into Difficulties and Challenges faced by Dam Oustees in India

Om Prakash Sharma¹, Ravindra Prakash Gupta², Devender Swaroop Bhargava³
¹Research Scholar, Civil Engineering, Shri JIJ University, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India
²Principal, MIT Bikaner, Rajasthan, India
³Ex-Professor, Civil Engineering, IIT Roorkee, Uttarakhand, India

Abstract: Whenever a dam construction is announced in a particular area, it leads lot of people clueless and anxious. The oustees or the Project affected persons (PAPs) or displaced persons (DPs) suffer on various counts especially social, economic, deep psychological anxiety, cultural, and spiritual deprivation to name a few. A large unaccounted and involuntarily displaced people (IDPs) also get affected as after-effects of such announcements or commencements of such projects. Going by the displacement history a lot of material is available on the media regarding the problems faced by outsee in India such as poor self-esteem, even after a period of half a century. Recently, pending Land Acquisition Bill is creating chaos amongst political parties as well as farmers. From the perspective of outsee, most important is the quality of life which her family shall enjoy after the completion of projects or acquisition. Although, extensive studies and examples are before us still, the paper envisages giving an insight into the problems and their remedies purely through simple approach of assessing the socio-economic parameters affecting the individual pre and post Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R).

Keywords: Challenges; Dam Oustee; Difficulty; DPs; IDPs; PAPs; R&R

I. INTRODUCTION

A dam constructed and filled with water up to full reservoir level causes large area of the order thousands of square kilometer getting submerged under water and all the properties belonging to this area are submerged and lost permanently as well as the population that is affected needs to be rehabilitated or resettled posing a huge problem that needs support from political and social systems [1]. The oustees or the affected goes into deep psychological anxiety. A large unaccounted number of people also get affected as after-effects of such announcements or commencements of such projects like prices of adjoining areas flourished by such projects see rise in prices of land [2].

We live in a country where it seems that there is a little will to be original and empathetic when it comes to rehabilitation and resettlement of outsee or paying compensation of freedom fighters - an analogy made between these two groups purely because both of these helps improving the quality of life of their peers. A lot of surveys done on the Dam outsee in India, comes out with the fact that an average Indian feel devastated and helpless in front of governmental policies as soon a project is announced for building dam or as a matter of fact on any land acquisition by governmental bodies. A common assumption is that we cannot do anything about it.

According to the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) and other sources, in India, 5,500 minor and major dams built since independence have together displaced an estimated 55 million people and submerged 44,00,000 hectares of land. Nearly 47% of people displaced by these dams are tribals [3]. Difficulties and challenges faced by the individual during pre and post Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) are also detailed in this paper.

II. STILL HEARING: UNRESOLVED AND YET TO BE IMPLEMENTED

Reports published in Times of India says that even after 50 years of such projects, the oustees still wait for a fair compensation (unfair already paid and seems to be exhausted within no time. The NGO working for the rights of Bhakra Dam oustees since the announcement of Bhakra pact on July 7, 1948, reveals that 36,000 families had lost their homes and land to the project and got varying amount of compensations ranging from as low as INR50 for uncultivable land to INR1000 per acre for agricultural land. Some families were rehabilitated in other adjoining districts or tehsils, but most of them returned back since they could not be accommodated there or given the ownership rights. It also questioned the official figure which was displayed by the dam as there was no room for agricultural labourers, landless persons, potters and many others. The pact is yet to be implemented. In 1971, the Himachal Pradesh government came out with rehabilitation and resettlement policy that provided for "land for land" and that too has not been implemented [4]. As on date, the problem is still unresolved, as one goes through an article of year 2013 in Times of India [5].

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Another case of Goa Dam oustees as pointed by PTI [6], faces the acute problems for the last three decades and still waits for rehabilitation. Many villagers re-located to rehabilitation centers near the dam are still facing drinking water shortage as on date. Further, several schemes promised to them have not been materialized. Several people in Goa who were displaced for the Selaulim dam project - proposed three decades ago in Sanguem taluka, are still waiting for rehabilitation. The villagers feel cheated by the government. Some 150 families was given plots for farming, but their plots got submerged under dam water. Such families wait for the government to consider their plea for alternate land. In yet another government unfulfilled promise, the state government proposed to constructed a building for a 35-bed hospital here with two operation theatres. This hospital was never made functional. People had to travel 100 km to Panaji in case of emergencies. Several people who have lost their lives on the way were reported. Ironically, the issue of proper rehabilitation was raised during the recently concluded state legislative assembly session. Authorities had assured the House to look into the issue and solve it on a priority basis, which has give hope to these villagers.

Sharma D., [7] feels saddened of the peaceful and democratic struggle of the 20,000 oustees displaced the rising waters of the of Narmada Dam that still needs to be rehabilitated and equates them with a crime that goes unpunished for 25 years. According to him, a majority of them are adivasis, that have been treated worse than cattle by successive governments. As a consequence of the progressive Rehabilitation Policy, as a part of the Narmada Tribunal 1979 and protracted struggle by the people, about 10,500 adivasis families have been given land in lieu of the land submerged or acquired for the project in Maharashtra and Gujarat, but to this date none has received acceptable agricultural land in Madhya Pradesh. The Madhya Pradesh government has failed to provide 'land for land' saying it has no surplus land for rehabilitation, and nor can it buy land for the oustees since the land prices have gone up in the recent past. But it expect the oustees to buy suitable land with the compensation package provided under 'Special Rehabilitation Grant' that replaces land allocation with a cash package. However, in case of Madhya Pradesh, the Writers and Publishers Limited, Indore, is nationally the 7th largest multi product Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in terms of area, slated to come up on 4,050 hectares of land and has already received the "in principle" approval. The total land that this one single SEZ occupies is approximately the total land that would be required to rehabilitate most of the SSP oustees. In Pravasi Bhartiya Sammelan in New Delhi, Jan 2010 witnessed poor intention of providing land to the oustees, even going to the extent of defying the Supreme Court orders.

Similarly, Indian People's Tribunal (IPT) releases report on Narmada Projects [8], like issues of massive displacement, rehabilitation, environmental compliance and overall cost-benefits of the big dam projects like, Sardar Sarovar, Indira Sagar, Omkareshwar and Jobat. It recommended that the concerned state governments and the Centre purchase private land for rehabilitation. A detailed survey of all affected families must be undertaken in consultation with the Gram Sabha to ensure agreement with the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, and regulatory bodies and ministries like the MoEF, Narmada Control Authority and Grievance Redressal Authority must act strongly to ensure agreement with law and norms of the Projects.

The case study in India demonstrates the people’s resistance and anti-dam movements around the country where despite strong centre Government support for the industry and pressure from international financial institutions to develop dams, people’s movements have managed to halt major projects [3].

III. DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY OUTSEE

The pangs of displacement and rehabilitation were studied and discussed in detail by Sharma S. [9] and others extensively. The displaced persons suffer on various counts, especially social, economic, psychological, cultural, spiritual deprivation. With our own experience and surveys with such oustees, we feel that a part of solution we can offer is through assessing the socio-economic parameters affecting the individual pre and post resettlement.

1. Economic uncertainty and Undervaluation of compensation: In most of the cases, oustees feel that they are not been fairly compensated by lumpsum cash, house sites, houses and agricultural lands. In totality one or more than one form of compensation may be insufficient for resettlement of an individual or family.

2. Problems of host communities or Ethnicity: Migration from the ancestral community, occupation, beliefs, culture and customs at resettlement at new site may lead to individual or group conflicts between previous inhabitants and the newcomers. Moreover, the collective identity lost is not replaceable.

3. Delayed Compensation; It is said that justice delayed is justice denied. The same are the feelings of a dam
4. **Multiple Displacement**: not settling the outsee in the same region can pose problems like low quality of life, lack of educational opportunities, limited career advancement, political and social instability and family members or relatives settled in other regions.

5. **Inability to handle cash compensation**: the educational background of rural or poor outsee may be a threat to handle the compensation received in a fair manner for the development and growth of his family. He may misuse as per his habits or immediate liability like consuming drugs or liquor or arranging the marriage of a daughter.

6. **Problems at Resettlement Sites and failure to provide alternative livelihoods**: resettlement sites are many times inhospitable in a number of ways and their locations are selected without reference to availability of livelihood opportunities, or the preferences of displaced persons themselves. The displaced families may lose their permanent sources of livelihood forever. The background education or skills of an outsee family may be insufficient for him to earn his livelihood in the changed scenario. Displacement destroys outsee common property resources, educational institutions which were also used for other community purposes, such losses are not compensated and are insufficient. The micro climatic changes may pose threat to outsee, disabling him to adjust to new food habits, resulting in malnutrition and morbidity. They may not seek adequate hospital/ health centre at relocated site.

7. **Illiteracy or failure to be consulted and informed**: From the beginning of the planning of projects and going through various stages of displacement and resettlement, it is to be expected that those likely to be negatively affected by the projects must be consulted and kept informed in such a way as to enable them to rebuild their destroyed lives in best possible manner. The outsees receive little or no information officially. They are not consulted or informed about the phasing and content of their rehabilitation package, their entitlements and their choices. Proper Consultancy of the Oustees and their peer groups and keeping them informed during the planning of the project may give a proper solution to this problem to certain extent.

8. **Absence of Advance and Comprehensive Planning for Rehabilitation**: In almost all of the cases there is lack of information and transparency, leading to various kinds of rumors and malpractices. Therefore, the oustees are unable to participate at various stages from land acquisition to rehabilitation; hence a sense of alienation prevails there. For rehabilitation purpose family is the unit but this term is defined unsuitably by the project management.

9. **Traumatic forced and delayed relocation**: Involuntary displacement and relocation, as a rule of thumb, is always extremely painful. A sensitive project bureaucracy can do wonders in relieving this trauma faced by outsees. Practically it has been observed that project authorities, are inadequately prepared to assist the families to relocate and to make a gradual and less painful transition to their new habitats.

10. **Special vulnerabilities variously by class, caste, gender or age**: Sharma [8] noted that at least 40 per cent displaced persons are tribal. Tribal people share same problems as rural, but they are more dependent on forests and common property resources, their documented legal rights on cultivable lands are even more tenuous, their ability to handle cash transactions in a market economy even more shaky, their skills for diversified livelihood not based on forests or land are even more rudimentary, and their ability to negotiate with state officials and courts even more weaker.

**IV. CONCLUSION: REMEDIAL MEASURES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

For effective R&R, new technologies may be used and previous experiences of the surveys done so far. A need to carry out detailed pre and post rehabilitation surveys must be done by project authorities. The outsee need to properly informed and counseled by forming advisory cells or community participation that educate them and understand their needs according to their backgrounds. As for the compensation, a computer based software may be devised pre-fed with statistical data and then customized based on outsee as an individual and his family in totality. For example, his annual household income, liabilities, his total assets, etc. The software may be devised in such a manner as to calculate the compensation based on weighted average of various parameters. It must be empathetically seen by the authorities that once the project is being installed and starts working, timely assessment and feedback from outsees are taken into account say after every quarter. The problems must not be
seen as short term; therefore such R&R must take in account the long-term perspective of an individual and his family.

REFERENCES


