
Impact of Mega Dams on the Internal Displacement: A Case Study in North-East India

UPAMA SAIKIA

Department of Political Science
Gauhati University, India

MIJING GWRA BASUMATARY

VIPIN CHANDRA LAL

Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics
University of Delhi, India

Abstract:

This paper tries to examine the development related displacement. This displacement is caused by the mega dam of North East India i.e. the Lower Subansiri project which is situated at the Gerukamukh region of the Dhemaji district, the border between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This article try to focus on the problems related to mega dam as well as its impact on the livelihood of the local people of the region and their livelihood. Here the focus is on the steps of government and the pressure groups as a response to this issue. The paper give some recommendation comply with this serious issue by providing proper resettlement as well as rehabilitation.

Key words: Mega dam, Development, Displacement, Rehabilitation, resettlement and security.

INTRODUCTION

Geographically North East India remain isolated from the mainstream of India as it is connected with mainstream India through a small Siliguri Corridor called “Chicken Neck”.

Though North East India is regarded as “Mini-India” as well, it is the gateway of South East Asia. Although there is no such development agenda established in North East India in spite of the popular expectations.

The various ethnic movements that emerged during the post-colonial period were also unsuccessful in articulating the question of development with the aspiration of the people. This peripheral attitude of central government highly contributed towards making North East India as an insurgency prone area. Of late, the region has started receiving significant attention of the India government. Interestingly, one of such initiative taken by the central government is transforming North East India a powerhouse constructing 145 dams to enhance and ensure India’s energy security in future (Mander, 1999).

It is pointed out that though the development is needed but it should not establish threatening towards human as well as environment. Here the analysis of development ridden displacement in North East India and Assam in particular is undertaken. It cannot be ignored that the fact that development induced displacement has complicated the problems related to rights and justice in India’s North East even more.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the types of displacement.
- To discuss the existing loopholes with regard to Mega dams and resettlement of displaced people of Assam.
- To study its impact on environment as well as in society.
- To crystallize the relationship between aggressor and victims.
- To study the role of political parties as well as pressure groups.
- Giving some solutions.

HYPOTHESIS

- i) Development induced displacement people are more than any other displacement.
- ii) There has been no active participation of the people of affected area.
- iii) Government response is not so much considerable.
- iv) Mega dam caused negative consequences rather than positive consequences.

METHODOLOGY

Victims of family were selected from affected area at random and they were contacted over phone to explain the purpose of the study and its relevance to seek their agreement to participate in the study. Those who wanted to give their consent were interviewed at their homes or another convenient place. To select further sample, a snowball sample technique were used until the desire sample size is obtained.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A voluminous body of literature on displacement exists across diverse regions, contexts and countries of the world. Dams in India have displaced many belongings to the weaker sections of society, during the last 50 years; some of 3300big dams have been constructed in India (Courtland, 2003).Most of the victims belong to Adivasi or Tribal people which constituted 40%-50% of the displaced population in certain areas of development induced displacement.

As a result of misguided state policy project affected communities have been subject to sudden eviction, lack of information, failure to prepare rehabilitation plans, low compensation, loss of asset and livelihood, traumicrolocation, destruction of community bonds, discrimination and

impoverishment (Mander, 1990). Such as huge problems are faced by northeastern state of India as here estimate to construct 168 dams which articulated hue and cry at present situation. Here emphasis has been given to mainly Lower Subansiri Project (LSP) which is situated at Garugamukh in the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh which is expected to produce 2000MW power under NHPC by ignoring seismicity and its environment (Hussain, 2007). This paper examines the issues of land acquisition, resettlement and rehabilitation concerning the LSP. It displaced both upstream as well as downstream people, curved away their traditional means of livelihood, their cultural rights and their right to life.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

IDPs constitute one of the largest excluded groups in society. It occurs immense loss of people's life whether it is professional or personal (Courtland, 2003). The conditions of IDPs are worse than refugee because former cannot cross the inert-borders and has to seek help from that authority which is very often responsible for their displacement. IDPs are those who are compelled or fled from the resistance due to conflict, environment as well as development related issues.

CLASSIFICATION OF IDPs

One can find all three kinds of IDPs in North East India i.e.:-

i) Conflict induced IDPs: Ethnic conflict includes the conflict between the state and ethnic groups/insurgent groups inter or intra ethnic conflict. Among North Eastern state IDPs quite high in Assam.

There are more than 100000 Hindu Muslims were displaced due to Assam agitation, language movement during 1960s, 70s and 80s. More than 200000 people were displaced

due to inter ethnic conflict between Bodo-Muslims and Bodo-Santhals.

ii) Development induced IDPs: Development induced IDPs those 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, mining, deforestation etc.

The Pagladiya Dam Project is constructed in Nalbari District of Lower Assam. The project is going to irrigate 54,125 hectares land and generate only 3 MW of electricity. But it would displace almost 1, 05,000 population most of whom are tribal people.

The Lower Subansiri Project (LSP) is to be constructed on the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It is generated 2000 MW of electricity under National Hydro Electricity Power Co-operation (NHPC). It submerged 3436 hectares land. The NHPC has already constructed their office on an elephant corridor (Manirul and Phanjoubam, 2007)

iii) Environment related IDPs: The environment degradation include flood, riverbank erosion, landslides etc. The cost of this degradation is difficult to estimate. The flood of 2004 alone affected more than 10 million people in Assam Valley. During 1951-2000, Brahmaputra eroded 3 million peasants.

PROBLEMS OF MEGA DAMS:

i) Threat to human lives: It has already been discussed earlier that mega dams caused threat to human lives. People were displaced from their habitat which curbed away 2 basic human needs i.e. food and shelter. Which threaten to Human Rights and they became unemployed which raised serious challenge to Right to Life and Right to Employment.

- ii) Threat to Environment: A huge area submerged by this project for this deforestation occurred and most of flora fauna could damage.
- iii) Lack of proper communication between authority and people: Role of NHPC is like suprastate institution. The lack of transparency and obduracy on the part of the NHPC has made the situation uncertain. As NHPC does not organize any public hearings to giving detailed information of the project.
- iv) Challenges towards Religion and Culture: Again NHPC has antagonized the people by hunting their religious and cultural sensibilities. It has been alleged that NHPC demolished Namghar on 2005. Further people felt that NHPC has no respect for indigenous people, their religion and culture.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND PRESSURE GROUPS

The people both downstream of Assam and upstream in Arunachal Pradesh have fought against the construction of the dam. Besides the resistance of the people both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh very significantly the Governor Assam raised objections to and expressed his apprehensions about the LSP. Perhaps this has happened for the first time in India. Nowhere in India, has a Governor of a state never raised such objections on a Mega Project sponsored by the Centre. The pressure groups like KrishakMuktiSangramSamiti (KMSS), Brahmaputra Valley Ganga SangramSamiti and other student organizations like All Assam Student Union (AASU), the All Dhemaji District Student Union (AADSU), the TakamMisingParimKaubang (TMPKetc. are doing ongoing protest. State government of Arunachal Pradesh opposed this Mega Hydroelectric Project executed through NEEPCO &

NHPC (Hussain, 2010). People become conscious and skeptical about the negative consequences of the project and threat of it.

That is the reason they vehemently opposed for its construction. The Arunachal Pradesh Government asserted that the big storage of reservoir had severe negative effects like inundating upstream areas including a large tract of reserved forest rare flora species and displacement of tribal as well as animal from the homeland.

The government also pointed out that Arunachal Pradesh falls in the highly fragile and highly vulnerable seismic zone-v. The state government is not opposed to dev. projects, as long as they are sustainable. Though the state government decided not to allow any new Mega Dam Projects, but the central government seems to remain intact with construction of mega dam projects.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is no doubt that dams are considered as one of the most technological intervention for the development prospects of any country in the world. Jawaharlal Nehru considered Dams as like 'Temple of India', now for its failure in security, it is considered as a 'Sin of India'. In a democratic country like India the voice of the people should be recognized. It is well accepted by all that no country can make progress in nation-building work, unless people at large not commensurate. The Narmada Bachao Andolan under the leadership of Medha Patkar opposing construction of Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujrat is the citation of good example. This anti-dam protest gave inspiration to people in India and all over the world. Mega dams would have supported by all if this would be happened human and eco-friendly (Menon et.al 2005). Therefore one may conceived that true development can neither be borrowed from elsewhere not it to be imposed. It has to evolve from within the society itself. In this process social progress, economic growth,

population, the nature and manmade resources, environment and development of human settlements are closely connected and interact. So development is now seen as security of livelihood i.e. 'JivonaruJivikarNirapatta' (Hussain, 2008). New sustainable plans and programs should be framed by focusing on the principles of ecology, economy, equality and justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

However, response to mega dam projects aimed at converting the North East India into India's powerhouse which has been facing stiff resistance from the local people. They have been demanding inclusion of Human Rights, Human Dignity and Justice besides popular grassroots participation in the planning and implementation agenda. It is also urge to high officials that they do not make policies sitting in the A.C. room. It is said so because unless they do not directly involved or faced their situation and its probable danger they are not able to understand its bitter consequences. When these IDPs should be an integral part of the development and its decision making process. Now it is overdue to write the obituary for the redundant land acquisition policy and the top-down development policy simultaneously. Again construct the micro dams instead of mega dams. The official put up notifications and organized public hearings in a local language. However there is a need of successful implementation of any program. It can be possible by a planning where each step of the programs specially identified, sequencing the steps properly responsibilities are attributed among unavailable personnel. Implementation should be attaining the grass root level. It must be admitted that there is dearth of strong and dedicated leadership in the region because of which human resources of the region can be utilized in an effective and productive way.

CONCLUSION

North East India is highly underdeveloped ethnically sensitive and politically disturbed area of India. According to SanjibBaruah of the centre for policy research in New Delhi says Assam accounted nearly more than half of the population of IDPs though it is unnoticed, unattended and unaddressed. Although a positive sign can be noticed as the state government for the first time contested the “centrality of the centre” in the context of centrally sponsored mega dam projects in the state. This is very significant development for India’s formal federal polity.

Emergence of popular resistance based on new political cleavages is strengthening the democratic consciousness of the people living in a peripheral region of the world’s largest democracy.

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