

## Development-Induced Displacement: The positioning of Women

**Navleen Kaur**

Associate Professor Dept. of Community Education and Disability Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

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### Abstract

Each year, millions of people around the globe are forcibly relocated and resettled away from their homes, lands and livelihoods in order to make way for large-scale development projects such as dams, reservoirs, power plants, roads, plantations, urban renewal, oil, gas, and mining projects. This forced relocation is known as development-induced displacement and resettlement. Around eighty percent of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons are women and their dependent children. They can be found in more than one hundred countries. Many have been living in camps and emergency situations for generations. This paper examines the reasons, causes, the financially supportive institutions for displacement, and its impact on the health, economic, sociological, psychological lives of the indigenous and vulnerable groups including women and children, and suggests measures for inclusive development.

**KEYWORDS:** Development; Displacement; Persons; Women; Children; Vulnerable Groups; Indigenous People; Resettlement; Inclusive Development.

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### Introduction:

Each year, millions of people are forcibly displaced by development projects, whether dams, roads, reservoirs of oil, gas and mining projects. While such projects can bring enormous benefits to society, they also impose costs, which are often borne by its poorest and the marginalized sections of the society. "For millions of people around the world—development has cost them their homes, their livelihoods, their health, and even their very lives."<sup>1</sup> Situation of penury and disempowerment is faced by women and children. These people are defined as internally displaced persons and displaced due to development, have been uprooted by conflict, human rights violations and natural or human-made disasters. "While victims of disaster—especially natural disaster—generally are the focus of sympathetic attention and international aid (as are many of those displaced by conflict), the same cannot be said for victims of development-induced displacement, although the consequences may be comparably dire."<sup>1</sup>

The phenomena of displacement are spread all over the globe. It is estimated that between seventy-five and eighty percent of the world's internally displaced persons and the refugees are women and their dependent children. They are found in almost all the countries of the world. These displaced groups have been living in camps and emergency situations for generations together. Their number is rapidly growing and has been

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- <sup>1</sup>W. Courtland Robinson (2003) "Risks and Rights: The Causes, Consequences, and Challenges of Development-induced Displacement," The Brookings Institution-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement: Washington D.C.,

surpassed the international community's capacity to provide adequate assistance. It is estimated that around the world daily around 10,000 persons are fleeing their homes. The compulsion for leaving their homes is civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and scarcity of resources, overpopulation, and poverty.

International concern about the plight of refugee and displaced women has been fueled by several factors. Its focus is on women's access to basic services; in planning and delivering emergency assistance; providing opportunities for economic self-reliance; and reconstructing their home countries after they repatriate. It identifies the obstacles hampering their full integration into economic and social programs and recommends steps to overcome these barriers. It recommends the greater involvement of development agencies and multilateral development banks in programs for refugees and displaced persons, and in efforts to make refugee and displaced women self-sustaining.

All types of displacement, whether by development projects or as a result of violence, persecution, or natural disaster, can lead to misery. It has been rightly pointed out that all types of populations experience a major disruption in their patterns of social organization and culture, and therefore face the same challenge of physically and culturally surviving this disruption by reorganizing their economies and ways of life.<sup>2</sup>

Women are key to the development challenge. Throughout the developing world, women are at a disadvantage at the household, community, and societal levels. Within the household, women have less access to control over resources and limited influence over household decisions. Beyond the household, women have limited access to communal resources, are under-represented in public decision-making bodies; have limited bargaining power in markets (such as the labor market), and often lack opportunities to improve their socioeconomic position. Therefore, efforts to reduce gender inequality are required.

#### **The Reasons:**

Development is one of the primary causes of forced migration in the world today. The swelling numbers however, give us a clear indicator of the magnitude of the problem. Experts estimate that over 250 million people worldwide have been displaced in the name of development over the past twenty years. In India alone, development projects have displaced more than 60 million people since independence. Similarly, in China more than 40 million people over the past half-century have been displaced due to development. The number of people forcibly displaced each year is also increasing.

Largely development –induced displacement is involuntary, with government authorities, security forces, or private army forcing people from their homes and lands. Displacement can be physical, economic, or both. Physical displacement refers to the actual relocation of individuals, families or communities from one place to another. Economic displacement occurs when people lose access to vital natural resources that they need to sustain their livelihoods such as forests, grazing lands, and fresh water. The impact of the project is not limited to the people displaced. For instance, the construction of a dam does not displace only those people and communities located on lands used for the project but even the people living down the stream suffer the loss of fisheries needed for their sustenance. Due to pollution from the mines, the entire community goes through

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• <sup>2</sup> Cernea, M. M. (1997) *The Risks and Reconstruction Model for Resettling Displaced Populations*, World Development, Vol. 25, No. 10, October, Pergamon Publication, Great Britain.

health problems. Both the situations force people to move out from their habitats. This is known as development-induced displacement.

People uprooted by development are displaced within the borders of their own countries. This differentiates them from refugees, who are legally defined as having fled across an international border to escape danger or a fear of persecution. This legal distinction is important, because internally displaced people are not protected by any instrument of international law which protects the refugees. Thus, it is difficult for any type of outside assistance to reach people who are internally displaced.

### **The Causes:**

The major causes of development –induced-displacement projects consist of: water supply (dams, reservoirs, irrigation); transportation (roads, highway, canals); energy (mining, power plants, oil exploration and extraction, pipelines); large mono-crop plantations (oil palm, grains, sugarcane, and soya), parks and forest reserves; population redistribution schemes; and urban infrastructure. Open pit mining, a method of extracting coal and other minerals from the earth, displaces millions of people worldwide. This is a major cause of deforestation and also use and produce toxic chemicals that contaminate soil, ground water, and surface water, and pose serious health risks.

With rapid urbanization occurring on a global scale, projects aimed at providing transportation, housing, electricity, water, sanitation, and other services to rapidly growing cities have emerged as major drivers of development –induced-displacement. The urban beautification schemes for making cities attractive to tourists, have displaced the entire neighborhoods. As per the UN estimates more than two billion people will be living in large cities with populations of more than one million people by the year 2025.

The most destructive and controversial development projects involving displacement are supported by financing from global institutions. Each year, international financial institutions such as the World Bank and Asian Development banks, local or international companies operating in those countries, provide hundreds of billions of dollars in the form of grants, loans, insurance and other financing to the governments. This funding supports projects in sectors ranging from transportation and infrastructure to legal reform, health and education.

Projects related with industries and energy, have resulted in massive forced displacement and replacement of people. These financial institutions exert enormous influence over policy-makers in lending and borrowing countries in framing norms and policies redefining ‘development.’ They have failed to protect the livelihoods of people affected by their procedures. The irony is that development projects meant for easing poverty instead are causing impoverishment by forcibly displacing large numbers of people from their homelands.

### **The Impact:**

The impact of development-induced displacement is witnessed in the factors given below:

- **New poverty and loss of kinship ties:**

The people who bear the brunt of the personal, social, and environmental costs of development –induced- displacement projects are not part of the share in the benefits. On the contrary, these lead to the impoverishment of the forcefully displaced, creating a new kind of poverty. Experts working for the development – induced- displacement rehabilitation have identified eight threats posed by these

projects. These are: landlessness; homelessness; joblessness; significant deterioration in incomes and livelihoods; food insecurity, undernourishment and hunger; serious declines in health, increase in morbidity, stress and psychological trauma, downward mobility leading to economic marginalization often accompanied by social and cultural marginalization, and profound social disintegration.<sup>3</sup>

People displaced by development are at risk of suffering from life-threatening diseases, epidemics, and loss of physical and mental health. They have less access to hospitals and health clinics. Even their accessibility to educational facilities is a distant dream, consequential to lost or delayed educational opportunities for children. Their family patterns of leadership, social organization, subsistence, kinship ties, and other informal networks providing mutual support when needed the most, have been dismantled.

• **Impact on the vulnerable groups:**

It is the poorest and most vulnerable members of a community who bear the heaviest costs of forced displacement like women, children, the elderly and the indigenous groups. For the natives, land is the foundation of their distinctiveness and their way of life, the impacts of displacement on them are distressing. These projects have worsened the state of natural seasonal rivulets, flooded the villages and destroyed people's lands and livelihoods. The effects of displacement included hunger, debt-bondage, and cultural disintegration.<sup>4</sup>

Despite formal protection by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, tribal groups and ethnic minorities have been affected by development –induced-displacement. The forced displacement of indigenous people violates Principle 9 of the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which stipulates that: "States are under a particular obligation to protect against the displacement of indigenous peoples, minorities, peasants, pastoralists, and other groups with a special dependency on and attachment to the land."<sup>5</sup> India fits into the example of maximum displacements of the tribal's in the world.<sup>6</sup>

- <sup>3</sup>Michael M. Cernea (1996) "Understanding and Preventing Impoverishment from Displacement: Reflections on the State of Knowledge," *Understanding Impoverishment: The Consequences of Development-induced Displacement*, ed. Christopher McDowell. Berghahn Books: Oxford & Providence, RI.
- <sup>4</sup> Marcus Colchester, Forest Peoples Programme, *Dams, Indigenous People and vulnerable ethnic minorities*, (WCD Thematic Review1.2, prepared as an input to the World Commission on Dams, Capetown, November 2000). Also see Ravi Hemadri Harsh Mander, Bisalpur Bandh Samanvay Samiti, and Vijay Nagaraj, "Dams, Displacement, Policy and Law in India," and Barbara RoseJohnston, "Reparations and the Right to Remedy, Displacement,
- <sup>5</sup>Report 2008: Development and Displacement, ed. Hari Mohan Mathur (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008); Robinson (2003, 10 & 11); and Arundhati Roy, "The Greater Common Good," (April 1999, <http://www.narmada.org/gcg/gcg.htm>).
- <sup>6</sup> Bartolome, et al. (2000: xxxi, note 12). The authors note that this figure would be around 60 percent if socially discriminated scheduled castes were included. For further discussion of the disproportionate impact of DIDR on India's tribes and castes see Colchester (2000, 14); *India Social Development*

- **Violations of basic human rights:**

The international community is sensitive to the misguided ‘development projects’ which displace millions of people and destroy their livelihoods, which are a sheer violations of human rights.<sup>7</sup> Financial institutions and the governments alike regularly fail to endorse their obligation to fairly compensate, resettle, and restore people’s livelihoods. Often it has been seen that people who even try to claim for their rights risk threats, degrading treatment or punishment, arbitrary arrest or detainment, violence and even torture from private or state security forces. Consequent to replacement, people often face the risk of communal violence in resettlement areas where tensions between members of existing communities and new settlers are common.<sup>8</sup>

- **Traditional knowledge of care of natural resources is lost:**

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes that conservation of our planet’s biodiversity and ecosystems is only possible if we conserve rapidly-disappearing traditional knowledge about how to care for and sustainably use our natural resources and ecosystems. When the indigenous and farming communities are forced to uproot and vacate their traditional lands to make way for development projects, their entire way of life is lost and along with it their practices for sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems also vanishes.

- **Encourage Climate change:**

Development-induced-displacement is linked to climate change through a vicious cycle. Large, carbon-intensive energy-sector projects such as oil extraction, coal mining, and bio-fuel plantations forcibly displace millions of people every year. These projects then generate greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming. This result to the rising of sea levels, mitigate longer droughts, increased flooding, and the loss of agricultural land and crops, which all can further set off forced migration and displacement.

### **Women at the Receiving End:**

All research studies depict women’s suffering due to forced displacement. Women are rendered one of the most vulnerable in the situations of forced displacement. They have to bear the brunt of the being caretakers of young and old; as earning members of the family; as wives who have to put up with emotional and physical backlash that the husbands unleash upon them due to frustration resulting from their economic and psychological inability to sustain the expected gender roles. But what is equally important, is to see women as important subjects in these situations. The above mentioned scenarios are rather focused only on the condition of women. This picture is incomplete because it fails to see the women as actors – as important subjects in the situation. When we fail to see women as subjects, we fail to see that women have taken

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○ [www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/principles.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/principles.htm)

○ <sup>7</sup>Bjorn Petterson, “Development-Induced Displacement: Internal Affair or International Human Rights Issue?,” *Forced Migration Review*, vol. 12 (January 2002):19.

○ <sup>8</sup> Rangachari, R., Sengupta, N., Iyer, R.R., Banerji, P., and Singh, S., *Large Dams: India’s Experience*, (WCD case study prepared as an input to the World Commission on Dams, Cape Town, November2000): 115.

all these situations in their stride and continued their struggle for betterment of the livelihoods of the families and community.

The consequences of development-induced displacement depend largely on how resettlement is planned, negotiated, and carried out. In modern dam-building history, displacement strategies and resettlement schemes have ranged from positive to grim. In the cases of China's Shuikou and Yantan dam projects the displaced women incomes and living standards improved and satisfaction with resettlement was reported to be high. In comparison to Guatemala's Chixoy Dam Project, massacre of hundreds of Indians by local civil patrolling groups and the country's Armed Forces to make way for the dam's construction were reported.

To cut the whole thing short, development-induced displacement often affects the marginalized population specially women and children, economically, politically, and socially. The impact of development-induced displacement on women is evident through the following:

- **Gender relationships and power structures are often detrimental to women:** Research has documents illustrating gender inequalities in access to, and control of, economic and natural resources. For example, in Asia women have rights over land and forests, but are rarely allowed to own and or inherit the land they use. This is due to the gender-blindness of the planning process of development projects which are built on the disparity in existing gender relations.
- **Governments still recognize only male heads of household as legitimate landowners not women** as a result denying women compensation for submerged lands and aggravate gender inequalities. In tribal communities where women enjoy user rights over land but not ownership rights, governments do not provide these women with any compensation or enhanced employment opportunities.
- **Cultural, economic, and health concerns have been dismantled.** The outcomes have included assetlessness, unemployment, debt-bondage, hunger, and cultural disintegration. Displacement has disproportionately impacted on women and children.
- **Displacement for women has brought emotional stress.** Men migrate and women are left behind to look after the home and children.
- **Control of women's sexuality a serious issue.** When women migrate, they work as domestic workers, daily wage earners, etc. Their additional income is extremely important for the family since it is often used to finance their children's education and health. They suffer great hardships in urban slums with regard to sanitation and privacy.
- **Loss of access to common property resources** like access to land, forest, etc.
- **Lack of sanitation facilities:** Sanitation is a major problem specific to displaced women. Not only did this make their lives physically uncomfortable, but also made them more vulnerable to physical and sexual harassment
- **Loss of livelihoods and marginalization of women:** It has been seen whenever there is unemployment arising out of displacement, women are the first ones to lose. This is not only because they lack the skill, but more because they have to make way for the men. Jobs are scarce in a displacement situation,
- **Landlessness, reduced land assets, joblessness of the men, and impoverishment, it becomes imperative that women work.** The traditional occupations, such as agriculture, fishing, basket-making etc. become unfeasible, either because of

- unavailability of raw material once the forest or the water source is taken away, or due to the dispersion of the clientele as a consequence of the breakdown of the community network. As a result, the women find that they have to settle for unskilled wage labour which is most often irregular and underpaid
- **Deprivation of women due to displacement is compounded with the absence of productive employment in the resettlement area.** Women are, therefore, forced to remain at home and only look after the household, without any productive work outside.
  - **Due to the loss of access to traditional sources of livelihood and the inability of the household to replace these sources, women get pushed into work in the most exploitative sectors.**
  - **Industries, irrigation and power projects have failed to assist women with skill training and facilitate entry into self-employment activities.**
  - **Women not only suffered in terms of poor health and malnutrition, they also lost the capacity to provide a secure future for their children.** By engaging in seasonal migration in the absence of other alternatives they have denied access to their children to school, health, child welfare, preschool and other welfare services.
  - **Women found work as agricultural labourers in projects only when men moved out to take employment in non-agricultural sector.**
  - **The invisibility of gender for rehabilitation purposes.** Since women were not landholders, they were not invited to meetings on land acquisition. Neither do the male members of the family tell them what transpired at such meetings.
  - **The increased distance between the woman's natal home and her marriage home due to displacement takes away the emotional support available to married women.**
  - **Decline in social status of women in family and society, the authority and right in decision-making that the women enjoyed within the family due to their position as income-earners gets weakened.**
  - **Subordination status of tribal women:** As compared to the mainstream society the tribals community allow greater freedom to women. Bride price instead of dowry is indicative that women's labour is respected and sought after. Widow remarriage is allowed and women do not have any social taboos as smoking etc. After displacement many of these things change.
  - **Tribal communities adopt customs and traditions of the mainstream society and dowry tends to replace bride price, taboos are imposed on women, which do not exist in their own culture**
  - **Breakdown of family:** During the transition period between actual displacement and resettlement, women suffer more being homeless. During this period the displaced people continue to have two houses. Mostly the women, the aged and the children who are left behind add to the responsibilities of women at both the locations.
  - **Additional workload and responsibilities:** Due to reduced family income as a consequence of displacement, women are burden on two counts such as search livelihood to add to the household income as well as the responsibility of household cores. Migration of the men in search of employment, undoubtedly, is another outcome of displacement, which increases the workload and responsibility of the displaced women. In addition to this, they have the social pressure of living alone.

- **Deteriorating health status among women:** High mortality rates, nutritional and health status of the women is lower than that of the men is witnessed.
- **Breakdown in social support network:** The displaced women prefer to move as a part of a community, neighboring or kinship group for various reasons. Women are less mobile, the breakdown of village and social units, thus, affects them much more severely.
- **Problem of marriage of daughters:** Studies reveal that girls have been married off early among the displaced families due to the availability of ready cash, which is paid as dowry, through compensation against their land being acquired by the project. Dowry rates also go up, as a result of which some families find it difficult to get their daughters married.
- **Sense of insecurity:** Sense of insecurity linked with rehabilitation has to do with the change in topographical and social environment.
- **Breakdown of lifestyles:** All these incidences just illustrate the myriad ways in which displacement leads to a breakdown of lifestyles.

#### **Inclusive Development:**

All financial institutions and the policymakers must ensure that development induced displacement is reduced. But when projects are made to improve affected people's standard of living and restore their livelihoods then displacement is unavoidable. To realize this, the following considerations should be kept in mind for achieving inclusive development.

- Demand new rules governing development-induced displacement rehabilitation and accountability systems that protect rights accompanied by strong systems and mechanisms for enforcement.
- Include the risks and financial responsibilities related to displacement and resettlement in project costs.
- Know your rights and demand development practices that do not violate their rights.
- Promote a development model based on the premise that projects which are better for people are also better for the planet.
- Defend community and traditional knowledge and work towards a world in which human connection to land, vibrant communities, healthy ecosystems, and democratic decision-making, as the foundation for human health, justice, and sustainability.
- Equal treatment to women in the eligibility for relief and resettlement benefits in the relief and rehabilitation policy. It should recognize the households headed by women and they should be treated equally for these benefits. Widowed women or divorcees living with male-headed households and having no legal rights in land should be considered as separate units for rehabilitation benefits.
- House or land in joint names: There are very few women who have ownership rights at the time of displacement. However, the rehabilitation plans must ensure joint ownership of both spouses at the time of new settlements.
- Compensation amount on lost assets or properties in joint names of the couple.
- Women participation in the entire processes of resettlement planning and implementation should be ensured.
- Creation of community resources of fuel and fodder, and facilities for health, nutrition and clean drinking water which are beneficial for women.
- Women should be equally treated with their male counterparts in the allocation of

jobs to the displaced people. In case of the women lacking the requisite skill, the project authorities or rehabilitation authorities should take necessary steps to provide them the required skill training before absorbing them in the jobs.

- Provision of sanitation facility in the resettlement colony
- National Relief and Rehabilitation Act mandatory.
- Representation of women officials in the Relief and Rehabilitation authorities who can better realize the gender issues in displacement and assist the displaced women for better rehabilitation.
- Provision of Educational facilities in the resettlement colonies to benefit the children in general and girl children in particular for their educational attainment.

**Conclusion:**

Thus, women are the worst victims of violence of development-induced displacement. The problems of displacement are enormous for them. Although women have participated in the protest movements against the development projects inducing displacement, still they have not yet been provided with equal beneficiaries status in the relief and rehabilitation packages. Until the relief and rehabilitation authorities are represented by women, who are able to address the gender issues and concerns in rehabilitation, genuine development is possible.

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