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Balancing Development and Displacement: A Study on the Impact of Dams and Infrastructure Projects in India

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Abstract

The construction of large-scale infrastructure projects, particularly dams, in India has resulted in significant displacement and complex developmental challenges. The displacement often disrupts traditional livelihoods, erodes cultural identities, and creates long-lasting challenges for affected communities, including inadequate compensation, poor resettlement options, and limited access to essential services. This paper examines the socio-economic and environmental impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects and dams in India. The focus is on the displacement caused by these projects and the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, such as women, tribal communities, and rural families. The study explores various case studies, including the Tehri Hydro Power Project in Uttarakhand, which displaced over 10,000 families, and the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River, displacing around 41,000 families, with 56 per cent of them being Adivasis. The paper also highlights the creation of the Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan and the displacement caused by the construction of Chandigarh as a planned city, which led to the relocation of approximately 50 villages. Protests of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Maharashtra, particularly in Raigad and Pune districts, are discussed as an example of resistance to infrastructure-led displacement. The paper emphasizes the need for more inclusive development strategies, better resettlement policies, and comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) to ensure that the benefits of such projects are more equitably distributed and do not disproportionately harm vulnerable groups.

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Introduction

The construction of large-scale infrastructure projects, particularly dams, has been a cornerstone of India's developmental agenda. These projects symbolize progress and economic growth but often come at a significant human and environmental cost. Among the most affected are tribal communities and other marginalized groups, who are disproportionately displaced due to their habitation in resource-rich regions such as fertile lands, dense forests, and mineral-rich areas. This displacement is not merely a physical relocation but a profound disruption of their socio-cultural fabric, livelihoods, and environmental connection. Sociologist Walter Fernandes estimates that 40 per cent of those displaced by development projects in India are tribals, highlighting the sharp inequities of development-induced displacement (Fernandes, 2001). Since the economic liberalization of 1991, the influx of multinational corporations and policies driven by globalization, privatization, and liberalization have increased the alienation of these communities from their ancestral lands. Projects backed by international financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have further intensified the exploitation of natural resources, often sidelining the rights of indigenous populations. This developmental paradigm raises urgent questions about justice and sustainability. Dams and infrastructure projects have significantly contributed to human development by providing essential resources such as irrigation and electricity. In India, post-independence policies prioritized harnessing water resources through large dams to support initiatives like the Green Revolution, aiming to transform the nation into a self-sufficient food producer (Vishwanath, 2014). Historically, displacement in India dates to the colonial era, where large-scale land acquisitions were conducted for infrastructure projects like railways and resource extraction, often uprooting indigenous communities. This trend continued into the post-independence period, notably during the Nehruvian era, with the establishment of public sector industries, large dams, and infrastructure projects leading to displacement (Kujur, 2023).The relationship between development programs and displacement in India is still a complex and divisive topic that causes a lot of discussion among academics, decision-makers, and impacted groups. This discussion covers a broad range of social, economic, environmental, and political factors, illustrating how difficult it is to balance development, human rights, and ecological sustainability.

This paper examines the socio-economic and environmental impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects and dams in India. It aims to explore the displacement caused by such projects, focusing on the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, including women and tribal communities. This study relies on secondary data from various journal articles, government reports, case studies, policy documents, newspaper reports, non-governmental organizations (NGO) reports, etc.

Theoretical Perspectives on Development-Induced Displacement

Development is a multidimensional process aimed at reorganizing and reorienting economic and social systems to enhance the overall quality of life. This involves ensuring access to basic amenities such as education, healthcare, housing, and sustainable livelihoods for all, thereby reducing human suffering. Amartya Sen, in his seminal work *"Development as Freedom"* (1999), articulates development as the expansion of human freedoms and individual capabilities, enabling people to avoid deprivations like starvation, undernourishment, morbidity, and mortality (Sen, 1999). He emphasizes that development is both the process of increasing individual freedoms and the means to achieve it. The United Nations' 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development reinforces this perspective, proclaiming development as an inalienable human right. It asserts that every person is entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural, and political development, wherein all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized (United Nations General Assembly, 1986). In the early years following its independence, India pursued such developmental ideals by initiating large-scale projects aimed at alleviating poverty and improving living standards. However, this development trajectory often adhered to the notion of *"no development without displacement,"* leading to significant controversies and resistance, particularly from marginalized communities (Kujur, 2023). The processes frequently lacked essential elements of participation, decentralization, and sustainability. The Development-Induced Displacement (DID) is deeply rooted in development, social justice, and human rights theories. Modernization theory suggests that large-scale infrastructure projects such as dams and urban renewal initiatives are necessary for economic progress, yet these projects often come at the cost of displacing vulnerable populations (Lone, 2005). The contradiction between development and displacement is examined through dependency theory, which critiques how such projects disproportionately benefit dominant economic groups while marginalizing already disadvantaged communities. The political economy of displacement further explains how state-led development projects often lead to the transfer of control over natural resources, such as rivers and forests, from local communities to state bureaucracies and private corporations. This shift represents a form of structural violence, where the rights of marginalized groups are subordinated to state development goals. Michael M. Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) Model identifies eight key impoverishment processes associated with resettlement: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, loss of access to common property resources, increased morbidity, and community disarticulation. This model emphasizes that displacement leads to social exclusion, both physically from geographic territories and economically and socially from established networks, resulting in a loss of socio-cultural resilience (Cernea, 2000). Development-induced displacement raises serious ethical concerns about the equitable distribution of costs and benefits of development, leading to debates on social justice and human rights (Terminski, 2012). The displacement of indigenous and tribal communities also marks a shift in resource control, moving authority over rivers and land from customary, community-based governance to state-led bureaucratic regulation. The theoretical lens of transitional justice informs by addressing the legal and moral dimensions of displacement, particularly through restitution, reparations, and participatory governance (Greiff & Duthie, 2010). The psychological consequences of displacement, including loss of

identity and place attachment, highlight the importance of cultural and mental health perspectives in resettlement strategies. In urban contexts, neoliberal development policies often drive displacement under the guise of modernization, raising concerns about the right to the city and social inclusion (Amin et al., 2021). Fitzgerald and Maharaj (2024) highlight displacements often result from mega-projects, clean-up campaigns, and speculative gentrification processes, which violate human rights by displacing the poor to the periphery. Addressing displacement necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates various aspects of transitional justice, including restitution, reparations, truth-telling, and criminal justice (Greiff & Duthie, 2010).

Displacement Due to Dams

The construction of large dams has long been a hallmark of India's development narrative, with projects like the Sardar Sarovar Dam, Tehri Dam, and others positioned as symbols of progress. The Sardar Sarovar Dam, part of the Narmada River Valley Project, is one of 30 large dams planned across the Narmada River. While designed to benefit 40 million people by providing water for irrigation and drinking purposes and generating electricity, the project displaced over 41,000 families across Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra, 56 per cent of whom were Adivasis (Thakkar, 2010). Displacement brought a host of challenges: inadequate compensation, fragmented or uncultivable land, lack of grazing grounds, poor access to clean drinking water, and health issues arising from unhygienic living conditions. Moreover, families were separated, fracturing close-knit village communities. In response to these injustices, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), led by Medha Patkar and Baba Amte, emerged as a voice for the displaced. While the government claims the dam is a *'lifeline of Gujarat,'* benefiting irrigation and drinking water supply across the state, the social and ecological costs remain severe. The submergence of 37,000 hectares of agricultural and forest land has destroyed wildlife habitats and livelihoods, leading to salinization, deforestation, and negative impacts on downstream fishing (Sikka, 2020). The Tehri Dam, the largest dam in India and the tallest in Asia, has similarly sparked controversy. Initiated in 1962 and completed in 2006, the dam displaced over 85,000 people across 125 villages (UK Essays, 2021). Promises of land rights, clean drinking water, and affordable electricity remain unfulfilled, leaving many displaced families without adequate support. The resettled communities report challenges ranging from inaccessible health care to infertile land, compounding their economic vulnerabilities (Sundaram et al., 2023).

Displacement due to dam construction is not unique to these two projects. The Pavana Dam in Maharashtra, built in 1972, displaced 1,100 people, of whom only 300 received benefits. Similarly, the Jobhat Dam in Madhya Pradesh uprooted tribal communities, while projects like the Hirakud and Bhakra Dams displaced tens of thousands, many of whom are still awaiting compensation decades later (Deccan Herald, 2013; Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, 2005). The Bhakra Dam, praised as a *"temple of modern India"* by Pandit Nehru, displaced 11,777 families from 256 villages in Himachal Pradesh. While the dam contributed to the Green Revolution, the displacement fractured communities and left many without adequate compensation. Urban resettlements like Bilaspur Town lack basic facilities, forcing displaced families to contend with yet another wave of displacement for infrastructure projects

(Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, 2005). The construction of dams, such as the Subansiri Hydroelectric Project (SHP) on the Subansiri River in Arunachal Pradesh, has led to the displacement of numerous indigenous communities. These communities, largely dependent on agriculture and traditional means of livelihood, often find themselves uprooted without adequate compensation or rehabilitation. According to Bhattacharya (2013), the SHP alone is expected to displace thousands of people, disrupting their social fabric, and leaving them without alternative means of subsistence. Furthermore, many of the displaced individuals are denied land rights or citizenship. The construction of the Lower Subansiri Hydro Power Project in Assam has sparked protests from local groups like the All-Assam Students Union, who argue that the displacement of local populations is not sufficiently addressed in the planning stages (Chetia, 2019). The lack of adequate resettlement programs leaves the displaced communities with few options for livelihood, forcing them into urban slums or other disadvantaged areas. Civil society groups have actively addressed the displacement issues arising from dam constructions in Assam. The People's Movement for Subansiri Valley (PMSV), established in 2004, has been at the forefront of opposing projects like the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project, citing risks to local communities. Similarly, the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), led by activist Akhil Gogoi, has campaigned against mega-dams and land acquisition policies, emphasizing the protection of indigenous land rights (Gogoi, 2019). The civil society organizations in Assam have been employing various strategies, including public meetings, protests, and rallies, to mobilize affected communities and advocate for their rights. The construction of the Dibang Valley Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh threatens the region's pristine environment. This project has the potential to affect the flora and fauna of the region, particularly the critically endangered species like the Bengal Florican and the Himalayan Salamander (Sarma, 2015). The hydropower sector in the Northeast has been accused of creating flooding problems. When reservoirs are filled or released, the sudden influx of water often causes downstream flooding, displacing more communities and destroying crops (Rai, 2018). The environmental costs of these projects compound the human toll. Submergence of forests, habitat destruction, and altered river ecosystems disrupt the delicate balance of nature. The salinization of water, deforestation, and silting of riverbeds further lead to ecological degradation. Moreover, the economic and emotional strain on displaced populations who lose access to common property resources, livelihoods, and social networks highlights the need for a more inclusive development model.

Displacement Due to Infrastructure Projects

Land Acquisition: A Critical Examination

The expansion of infrastructure and mining projects in India has led to significant displacement of communities, raising concerns about food security, environmental degradation, and social instability. In Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh, the expansion of Gaggal Airport involves a proposed investment of Rs. 10,000 crore, with Rs. 2,000 crore allocated for land acquisition. This project will displace 1,446 families from 14 villages and result in the reduction of agricultural land, which could adversely impact the local economy and food security (Mullick, 2024). Similarly, the Shahid Bhagat Singh International Airport in Mohali, Punjab, is set to acquire 5,438 acres of land across 14 villages for its expansion. Farmers fear that the loss of prime agricultural land will increase food insecurity in the long

run. The varying compensation packages offered have caused friction between the government and affected communities, leading to delays and litigation. Farmers who toiled to make infertile land arable now face displacement, which threatens pastoral activities, breaks social cohesion, and particularly impacts women who rely on livestock rearing for their livelihoods. This is in addition to 305 acres already transferred to the Airports Authority of India in 2008 (Bridger, 2024). Mining projects have had similarly severe consequences. In Haryana's Lath village, the Chaal coal mine displaced around 400 Adivasi families in 2003. The open-cast mining operations polluted water sources and destroyed agricultural lands, replacing rice fields with black pits and clogging nearby rivers with waste. This forced many to abandon their homes and livelihoods, including fishing, which once supported the community (Naidu, 2024). The Hasdeo Arand Forest in Chhattisgarh exemplifies the widespread displacement caused by mining. Spanning over 1,500 square kilometers and rich in coal reserves, the region has been divided into 23 coal blocks, six of which have already been approved for mining. Despite protests, including a 10-day march to Raipur in 2021, corporate interests prevailed. Companies, including the Adani Group, used tactics referred to by Matthew Himley as *"social engineering of extraction,"* co-opting local leaders to suppress resistance. Villagers who initially opposed mining projects were silenced by monetary incentives, weakening collective protest efforts (Naidu, 2024). Historically, mining has displaced millions. Between 1950 and 1990 alone, approximately 2.55 million people were displaced due to mining projects. In Jharkhand, over 1.5 million people have been forced to relocate, often without proper consultation or compensation. Laws like the Coal Bearing Areas Acquisition and Development Act (1957) fail to meet international standards for land acquisition, exacerbating issues of inequity and neglect. For instance, during the Kusmunda mine expansion in Chhattisgarh, land acquisition announcements were published in newspapers and government gazettes, formats inaccessible to the predominantly illiterate local population (Das, 2021).

Conservation and Urbanization Projects

The ongoing displacement caused by large-scale development projects in India has far-reaching social and economic consequences. One notable example is the expansion of the Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan, which is being considered for designation as a tiger reserve. This project threatens to displace the Bhils, Garasias, and Raika Pastoralists, who depend on the sanctuary's resources for their livelihoods. While the government argues that the creation of the reserve will lead to increased employment opportunities, locals, particularly the tribals, fear loss of access to the forest, which supports agriculture and livestock for approximately 162 surrounding villages. A forest rights lawyer, Meenal Tatpati, contends that there are no tigers in the sanctuary, which has long been home to wolves, leopards, and antelopes, thus challenging the justification for declaring it a reserve (Mohanty, 2023). Moreover, the Gram Sabha, which represents the local community, was not consulted in the decision-making process. This issue of displacement due to conservation efforts is not isolated. The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has disclosed that since the inception of Project Tiger in India, 18,493 families from 215 villages across protected areas have been displaced (Down To Earth, 2024). Displaced communities from other tiger reserves, such as Rajaji in Uttarakhand and Mudumalai in Tamil Nadu, have

protested the government's actions, citing the lack of implementation of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) and the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006, which are intended to protect their rights over land and resources. In Chhattisgarh, the establishment of the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve in the early 2000s led to the displacement of people from six villages, and efforts to displace 19 more villages are ongoing. According to the Indian Social Institute, 21.3 lakh people have been displaced due to such projects, with the majority affected by dam constructions and mining activities (Down To Earth, 2024). Urbanization projects have also contributed to displacement. A prime example is Chandigarh, the capital city of Punjab, which was conceived as a symbol of post-independence India's modernity. In the 1950s, approximately 8,500 acres of fertile land were acquired from 50 Punjab villages for the city's construction. While Chandigarh is heralded as a model of urban planning, the displaced villagers were given minimal compensation and have continued to face marginalization. Many displaced individuals have been unable to retain traditional livelihoods, such as animal husbandry, due to municipal regulations. The loss of agricultural land and cultural heritage has left these communities struggling to adapt to a changed reality (Springstubb, 2022; The Tribune, 2016).

The Impact of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in India

The establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in India, particularly since the passage of the SEZ Act in 2005, was aimed at promoting industrial development, generating employment, and increasing exports. However, the process of land acquisition for these zones has resulted in significant displacement of communities, particularly farmers and fishermen, leading to social and economic upheaval. The Mundra Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Gujarat, developed by the Adani Group, spans approximately 100 square kilometers along the Gulf of Kutch. This expansive project has significantly impacted local communities, particularly fishermen who rely on the coastal ecosystem for their livelihoods. The construction and expansion of the SEZ have led to environmental degradation, including the destruction of mangroves and alterations to coastal waterways, which in turn have adversely affected fish populations and the broader marine ecology. These environmental changes have disrupted the traditional fishing practices of local communities, leading to economic hardships and displacement. A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India 2013 found that the Gujarat government incorrectly classified mangrove forests as degraded to facilitate land diversion to the Adani Group's Mundra Port and Special Economic Zone (MPSEZ). This misclassification led to the destruction of approximately 2,000 hectares of mangroves in Kutch and resulted in an undue financial benefit of Rs 58.64 crore to the Adani Group (Chakravarty, 2015). The local fisherfolk, who rely on the sea for their livelihood, are particularly vulnerable as the construction of an airstrip and the clearing of mangroves disrupt their access to fishing routes and destroy critical natural barriers that protect the region from environmental disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis. Despite the claims of the Adani Group that employment opportunities will be created, the fisherfolk argue that they are being forced into labour-intensive jobs with meager compensation, undermining their traditional livelihoods. These issues highlight the need for an anthropological approach to understanding the political and economic implications of SEZs (Sampat, 2010). Likewise, the SEZ project in Kutch has faced fierce opposition from local

communities, who argue that it violates Coastal Regulation Zone laws and threatens the fragile ecosystem. In particular, the construction of the SEZ has led to the filling of creeks, which disrupts the migration routes for both fish and pastoral communities. The displacement of pastoralists who rely on grazing land increased the socio-economic divide, as these communities lose both their land and their means of subsistence (Down to Earth, 2013). The ongoing protests by local villagers, including the filing of Public Interest Litigations (PILs), highlight the deep discontent with the SEZ projects, which prioritize industrial growth over the well-being of local populations. The Maharashtra State has seen a proliferation of SEZs, with 205 proposals sanctioned by the government in 2009 alone. However, these projects have sparked significant unrest among the affected populations. In Raigad, for example, the acquisition of 14,000 hectares for a multi-service SEZ proposed by Reliance Industries Ltd threatens to displace more than 200,000 people, including Adivasis and fisherfolk, who rely on the land for farming, grazing, and salt production (Kale, 2010). Similar concerns are raised in the Pune district, where the Bharat Forge SEZ requires the acquisition of 7,500 hectares of land, predominantly from agricultural communities. The villagers are protesting the loss of fertile land that has been the source of their livelihood, arguing that the SEZ projects do not consider sustainable alternatives to improve local infrastructure and agriculture (Kale, 2010). The government's approach to land acquisition for SEZs often involves forced displacement without adequate consultation with affected communities, leaving little room for negotiation or redress. In many cases, the compensation offered is insufficient and does not reflect the true value of the land or the loss of livelihood. In the case of Sinnar in Nashik District, for example, farmers who had successfully implemented watershed management techniques to irrigate the land are now facing the prospect of losing their hard-earned agricultural gains to make way for an SEZ (Kale, 2010). This is a common pattern across SEZ projects, where land that had been converted into productive agricultural land is handed over to developers, while the displaced communities are left without viable alternatives for income or livelihood. The situation in Dharavi Bet, an island surrounded by the Arabian Sea and creeks of Mumbai and Thane, underlines the ongoing tensions between development and environmental preservation. The area is rich in natural resources, with 60 per cent of the population dependent on fishing, while others engage in farming, small-scale businesses, and salt-making. The presence of mangrove forests and the continuous growth of vegetables and fruits throughout the year make it a vital ecological area. Developers, particularly the Pan India Paryatan Ltd (ESSEL), are eager to acquire this territory, which is reportedly 5743 hectares, much larger than the 2500 acres documented by government sources. The proposed Special Economic Zone (SEZ) threatens to displace around 150,000 people across ten villages in Dharavi (The Hindu, 2024). While SEZs are promoted as engines of economic growth, their social and environmental costs are significant. The displacement of local communities, particularly those dependent on agriculture and traditional livelihoods, raises questions about the long-term sustainability of these projects. As the government continues to approve new SEZs across the country, it must address the concerns of displaced populations, ensuring that they are adequately compensated and provided with opportunities for rehabilitation. Without such measures, the promise of development risks being undermined by growing social inequality and environmental degradation.

The Struggle for Land and Identity the Chakma Issue

The case of the Chakmas in northeastern India shows the complex issues of displacement, citizenship, and ethnic tensions. The Chakmas, who fled religious persecution in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the 1960s, were initially displaced by the construction of the Karnafuli power plant and Kaptai dam. Nearly 100,000 Chakmas were displaced, with 40 per cent seeking refuge in India, particularly in the Arunachal Pradesh region. Despite receiving basic sustenance under the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA), the Chakmas' situation worsened after Arunachal Pradesh became a Union Territory in 1972 and later a state in 1987. Tensions between the Chakmas and local communities intensified, partly due to their higher agricultural success (Chetia, 2019). The Chakmas' status remains contentious. While the older generation was provided valid migration documents, the next generation demanded citizenship due to their birth in India (Izzat, 2022). The Chakmas' claim to Indian citizenship was supported by the Supreme Court's September 2015 ruling, which directed the government to grant them citizenship rights. However, this decision has not been implemented fully, and the Chakmas continue to live in fear, particularly in areas where their community is concentrated. Protests from the indigenous population in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram reflect a broader resistance to Chakma settlement, with allegations that their growing numbers threaten the local economy and encroach upon forest and pastoral lands (Chakma, 2017). The resistance from both the local populations and displaced communities demonstrates the intricate and often contentious relationship between land, resources, and identity in India's development trajectory.

Discussion

Dams are essential components of development, providing benefits such as irrigation, hydropower, water supply, and flood control. However, their construction can lead to negative environmental and socio-economic impacts, particularly affecting marginalized communities that rely on riverine resources. While the economic benefits of dams have traditionally been assumed to outweigh the costs, recent research emphasizes the need to consider their long-term sustainability and the distribution of benefits and costs. Large dam projects remain controversial, especially in developing countries, where they often symbolize conflicts between economic interests and environmental or social consequences. Although dams continue to be constructed globally due to the growing need for water and energy security, there is increasing focus on improving project planning and implementation to mitigate negative impacts and find common ground between advocates and opponents. Environmental issues associated with dams include ecological disruption and alterations to river systems. Social impacts are particularly severe, as inadequate compensation and rehabilitation for displaced communities often lead to the loss of livelihoods and economic opportunities. Women and tribal communities bear a disproportionate burden of development-induced displacement. Women frequently suffer extra challenges such as job loss, higher health risks, and social disempowerment, because resettlement strategies frequently fail to address their special needs. Tribal groups face significant disturbances to their socio-cultural identities, including the loss of ancestral lands and the deterioration of traditional knowledge systems, which leads to marginalisation and poverty. The Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River demonstrates these challenges, highlighting the

importance of conducting Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) to identify and mitigate potential ecological damages. India has various policies and provisions for rehabilitation for the displaced population. Mainly, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement (RFCTLARR) Act of 2013 was enacted in India to address the challenges associated with land acquisition and displacement. While the Act aimed to ensure fair compensation and transparent processes, its implementation has revealed several shortcomings. Critics argue that the Act, despite its intent, has not fully achieved its objectives of making affected persons partners in development. To enhance the effectiveness of displacement and resettlement policies, it is imperative to address these gaps by ensuring that compensation mechanisms are equitable and inclusive, and that the rights and needs of all affected populations are adequately considered. Government should ensure transparent implementation of resettlement policies; involve affected communities in decision-making processes. While economic growth remains a priority, the recurring marginalization of vulnerable groups realized the need for inclusive policies that balance progress with equity. Comprehensive and humane resettlement strategies must replace exploitative practices to ensure that development does not come at the cost of human dignity and environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

The development of dams and large-scale infrastructure projects in India presents a complex intersection of progress and displacement. While these projects contribute significantly to economic growth through improved irrigation, hydropower, and flood control, they also lead to substantial socio-economic and environmental costs. The displacement of vulnerable communities, particularly tribal and marginalized groups, is often accompanied by inadequate resettlement and rehabilitation measures, resulting in the loss of livelihoods and cultural identity. As the nation continues to prioritize infrastructure development to meet growing demands for water, energy, and economic security, it is essential to recognize the need for a more inclusive approach. This includes prioritizing environmental sustainability, conducting comprehensive EIA, and ensuring that the voices of displaced communities are heard in the decision-making process. Moving forward, it is very important to strike a balance between development goals and the protection of human rights, creating a development model that truly benefits all sections of society, while minimizing the adverse impacts on the most vulnerable.

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