

Dams Displacement and Resettlement in Himachal Pradesh: A Study of Chamera Dam

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ABSTRACT

In the recent years, there has been a growing debate on the usefulness, or otherwise, of large and multipurpose dams being planned and built for irrigation and hydro-electric purposes. While government has been clearing these projects, various environmentalist, scientist, activists and people's organisations from different parts of the country have been raising critiques and questions about long term contribution of these dams. Large dams have led to the involuntary displacement of millions of people over the last century. The problem of shifting and rehabilitation of settlements is required to be given a thorough consideration. Despite the severity and scale of the trauma of displacement, India is yet to formulate a national rehabilitation policy. The specific purpose of this study has been to investigate the issue of displacement and resettlement by looking into the experiences of people affected by the construction of the large dams, to assess their reaction, receptivity, and outlook towards the projects and to evaluate the rehabilitation process for the affected population in Himachal Pradesh with special reference to Chamera Dam in Himachal Pradesh. The interview method was adopted for collecting the data. Survey has been conducted with the help of a well designed interview schedule.

Key words: Involuntary displacement, Rehabilitation, Outstees, Pauperization, Marginalization, Impoverishment.

Introduction

Development through investment in setting up projects brings about manifold benefits for the country, in general, and for the regions, in particular (Gajarajan, 1970; Muthayya, *et al.*, 1975). In the name of development, progress or wealth-creation and economic adjustment, people all over the world are being subjected to constant upheaval and involuntary change. In this process whole countries have been adversely affected, their populations being forcibly uprooted (Seabrook, 1993).

Displacement constitutes a major human problem in India. It dislocates people from their home, land and environment and has traumatic conse-

quences for their lives. Displacement can be caused by natural calamities such as flood, cyclone, tsunami, earthquake and manmade factors such as political conflict, wars and social strife. Displacement from development projects is invariably permanent. This is because modern development is associated with big projects requiring huge areas of land, such as dams, airports, industrial plants, housing etc. (Saxena, 2013). Out of various projects, dams rank at the top of the list in displacing people.

History is the witness that whenever and wherever dams have been built, people of the area have put up resistance. But the leaders/bureaucrats have either made lucrative promised or threatened the people. V.N. Gadgil, Minister-in-charge of India's

multi-dam Damodar Valley Corporation Project in 1948 promised—"every person who will be uprooted from the soil – will exchange his shovel for a decent cottage, darkness for light and fanaticism for faith". But it is seen that the great majority of those displaced by the dams have statistically disappeared, swallowed up by the slums and the camps of migrant labourers. In India, perhaps three-quarters of the millions of dam ousters were given no replacement land or housing at best they received a small sum of cash compensation, often they got nothing at all (Maloney, 1990).

In 1961, the then Finance Minister of India, Sh. Morarji Desai spoke at a public meeting in submergence zone of Pong Dam (now in Himachal Pradesh), "We will request you to move from your houses after the dam comes up. If you move, it will be good, otherwise we shall release the waters and drown you all" (Referred in McCully's book, 'Silenced Rivers', 1998). Surprisingly the Pong Dam oustees were given land in Rajasthan where they were harassed and even beaten up by the host population. Many of them returned to Himachal Pradesh only to find that they were no longer acceptable, as they used to be, among the members of their group (Thukral, 1989).

To many leaders, engineers, bureaucrats, nationalists and revolutionaries, big dams have been potent symbols of both patriotic pride and the conquest of nature by man as they symbolize progress. They are concrete, rock and earth expressions of the dominant ideology of the technological age: icons of economic development and scientific progress. On seeing the Nangal Canal and the construction site of the Bhakra Dam in 1954, the then Prime Minister of India Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru expressed, "What a stupendous, magnificent work – a work which only that nation can take up which has faith and boldness... it has become the symbol of a nation's will to march forward with strength, determination and courage... as I walked around the dam site I thought that these days the biggest temples and mosques and gurudwara is the place where man works for the good of mankind. Which place can be greater than this, this Bhakra-Nangal, where thousands and lakhs of men have worked, have shed their blood and sweat and laid down their lives as well? Where can be a greater and holier place than this, which we can regard as higher?" (Nehru, Speeches, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1958).

Projects undertaken to promote development

have been major cause of population displacement in many cases. Displacement for development is the process of physically uprooting large sections of people from their land, economy, resources and culture. In this process of displacement, many villages are uprooted and socio-economic structure of the village is destroyed. Moreover, involuntary displacement disturbs and, at times, completely dismantles production base and, thus, induces impoverishment among the affected populations. It affects the entire community: it evicts the literate, the weak and the strong, skilled and unskilled, the poor and the wealthy, the healthy and the crippled alike. It disrupts long established social networks and with them the social support systems through which the very young, the very old, the poor and other vulnerable members of the community are sustained. Whether they are capable or not, they all must go (Partridge, 1989).

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, while laying the cornerstone of Hirakud Dam told the villagers that "if you are to suffer, you should suffer for the interest of the country" (The Bombay Chronicle, 5 April, 1948). The laws of many countries provide for the acquisition of land in the national interest, and the state is under no obligation to notify the 'public purpose', which is supposed to be necessary to justify the expropriation of people. The oustees being the victims of development, through the loss of their established homes, means livelihood and sustenance economy are forced to depend on the market relations, without the necessary capital or skills, places them at a disadvantage from very beginning. Displacement, thus, usually leads to their pauperization and increased marginalization (Singh, 1997).

The ideology of development is used to strengthen arguments in favour of displacement of the people. No doubt, the various developmental projects improve many people's lives, provide employment and supply better services. But the involuntary displacements caused by such programmes also create major impositions on some population segments. They restrict that population's rights by state-power intervention are often carried out in ways that cause the affected populations to end up worse off.

A large number of these displaced persons belong to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. While tribals form only seven percent of the country's population, their proportion among those displaced

by development projects is as high as 40 percent. Similarly, though the Scheduled Castes form only 15 percent of the country's population, their proportion among the displaced is much higher (Fernandes and Thukral, 1992). The number of total oustees, because of the construction of huge projects, is as important as the number of those transferred in the holocaust that followed the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 (Mankodi, 1989).

Dams in India

Dams in India are also not a new phenomenon. The need to harness the flowing waters of a river was felt long ago and it is believed that the mountain which Vrithasutra was guarding when the Aryans are said to have attacked the Indus Valley Civilization, might well have been in reality a huge earth or rock-fill dam. Scientific irrigation seems to have been practiced since the time of the Rig Veda (Thukral, 1992). It describes a 'well' as that which is unfailling and full of water. Well water in vedic times was harnessed by means of a wheel, strap and water pails. One also finds reference to artificial water-channels for irrigation purposes. The 'ghatachakra' and 'asmachakra' were probably the wheels which made mechanical irrigation possible (Paranjpye, 1988).

Kautilya's 'Arthashastra', which to date is the most acclaimed treatise on the ancient political economy of our country, gives elaborate descriptions of the duties of a king towards the development of agriculture. It states that the king shall construct reservoirs for providing a perennial water supply and adds, that for those private individuals who construct them of their own accord, the king shall provide sites, roads, timber, etc. without any charge until the private owners realize profits worth twice the initial expenditure incurred. In the 'Arthashastra' one finds reference to the concept of 'kheyas', which were irrigation channels, and 'bandhyas' or bunds constructed through co-operative effort (Paranjpye, 1988).

The irrigation schemes as described in the 'Mahabharata' and the 'Puranas' provided not only against drought but also against floods and excessive rains. In those days when the river systems had their natural flow and were not silted up as they are today, floods did not pay an annual visit with the monsoon. In Buddhist literature too, one finds several similar concepts. The most elaborate treatment is contained in three volumes written in Pali language. These three volumes, besides discussing the

philosophy underlying water resource development also correspond to the modern concepts of 'catchment', 'command' and run-off or 'yield at reservoir' which are used today.

Although the recorded history of major dams in India dates back to as early as the 1700's when the Jaismand Tank near Udaipur was built, the era of modern day large dams began in the early 1930's (Thukral, 1992). This was also the time when dams were considered the symbols of technological advancement and development the world over. Not to be left behind, India too went into a sudden frenzy to construct more and more dams. Hirakund, Bhakra, Nagarjunasagar, Damodar Valley, Pong, all of these became symbols of economic progress and truly enough, they did provide employment and irrigation facilities, moderating floods, and generating hydroelectricity. Upto 1980, about 15 per cent of Independent India's total national expenditure had been spent on the construction of dams. (Thukral, 1992)

The most systematic description of the consequences of damming has been provided by Cernea (1996) in his report made for the World Bank Environment Department. These include *landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, morbidity, social disarticulation and loss of access to common property.*

Thus, as is clear from the above discourse, developmental projects in general, and construction of big dams in particular, can result in various adverse results for the people. Even though a large number of big dams have been constructed in India since independence, there is, as yet limited information concerning what happens to the people affected by such projects. Have they been re-settled properly and compensated; has any policy for their re-habilitation been framed by the Govt. agencies; and are the policies, if framed, being implemented properly to the benefit of the affected people?

Damming Scenario in Himachal Pradesh

The state of Himachal Pradesh is blessed with abundant water resources in its five major rivers-Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Satluj and Yamuna-which emanate from the Western Himalayas and flow through the Pradesh. These snow-fed rivers and their tributaries carry copious discharge all the year and flow with steep bed slopes, which is being exploited for power generation.

Himachal Pradesh is extremely rich in hydel re-

sources and the state has about 25 per cent of the national potential in this respect. The Satluj, Yamuna, Beas, Ravi and Chenab are the main rivers in Himachal Pradesh. It has been estimated that about 27436 MW of hydel power can be generated in the state by constructing various major, medium, small and mini/micro hydel projects on the five river basins (Sharma, Rana, 2014). The basin wise potential are as under:-

Hydel potential in the state of Himachal Pradesh

Sr. No.	Rivers	Potential in MW
1	Satluj	13332 MW
2	Beas	5995 MW
3	Chenab	4032 MW
4	Ravi	3237 MW
5	Yamuna	840 MW
	Total	27,436 MW

As early as in 1908, the Chamba State under the administrative capabilities of the then Raja Sir Bhuri Singh set up a 35 K.W. D.C. hydel generating power house at Chamba. This was the first Power House in northern India and as such Chamba town had electricity much earlier than Lahore, the capital of Punjab.

Another hydro-electric power project (Chaba Project near Shimla) in the area what comprises now the State of Himachal Pradesh was set up way back in 1912. The then British Government initiated the Chaba Project near Shimla, to meet the requirements of this erstwhile capital of the British Raj. This was followed by commissioning of power house in Bharmour (Chamba District) in 1933 and also installing another 100 K.W. D.C. hydel generating set in Bhuri Singh Power House, Chamba in 1938 which was replaced by new 100 K.W. A.C. hydel generating set in 1957. The old 35 K.W. D.C. hydel generating set was also replaced by 100 K.W. A.C. hydel generating set by augmenting the power house, thus making the capacity of the power generation as 200 K.W. Further augmentation of Bhuri Singh power house was taken in hand in 1983 and completed in 1985 by installing a new generating unite of 250 KW by extending the existing power house building. With this augmentation the capacity of Bhuri Singh Power House has increased to 450 KW.

The Shanau Power House was built at Joginder Nagar (Mandi District), for the construction of which the Kangra railway line was laid down from

Pathankot to Jogindernagar. Though in the late sixties a number of small projects were taken up, it was only after the formation of Himachal Pradesh as a full-fledged State in 1971 that systematic hydro-power development was undertaken.

People displaced by the Bhakra Dam, one of the earliest dams built in post-Independence India, continue to face rehabilitation and resettlement hurdles. Built on the Sutlej, the dam displaced or affected thousands of people living in Bilaspur and Una districts. Many of the displaced persons who later settled in the New Bilaspur Township were declared encroachers due to anomalies in the settlement process. Many oustees have not been allotted land till date, while many resettled areas lack basic amenities. The pain of people affected by the project has not ended even after more than half a century. (The Indianexpress, 2020)

The first large dam was constructed across the river Beas at the foothills of the Shivalik Range and is located at Village Pong in Dehra- Gopipur tehsil of Kangra district in Himachal Pradesh. The construction of the dam commenced in 1961 and was completed by 1974. The full Reservoir Level of the dam was 433.12 metres. The reservoir submerged 71.724 acres of land belonging to 30,000 families, i.e., a population of 1,50,000 spread over 94 villages in Nurpur and Dehra- Gopipur tehsils of Kangra district. The displaced population was to be rehabilitated in the command area of the Pong dam which is in Rajasthan. However, not all the outstees were rehabilitated there. Those who were not entitled to land compensation did not go to Rajasthan but those displaced people who went to Rajasthan just could not hold on to their allotted lands due to the hostility of the host population. They came back to Himachal empty-handed, where they now face an uncertain future. Socio-culturally there was nothing in common between the hosts and resettlers in this case. This proved to be a major stumbling block that wrecked all chances for these people to rebuild their lives in an area chosen with no regard to their socio-cultural concerns (Bhanot, Singh, 1992). Those oustees who had settled themselves in Himachal Pradesh were now living in different areas depending upon their convenience.

The National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) was set up in 1975. In its existence of over 45 years, NHPC has become the largest organization for hydro power development in India, with capabilities to undertake all the activities from

conceptualization to commissioning in relation to setting up of hydro projects.

Baira Siul Hydroelectric Project in Himachal Pradesh was the first venture to be taken up by the N.H.P.C. The Project is located in the District of Chamba. It utilizes flow of the three tributaries of the river Ravi-Baira, siul and Bhaledh. The Project construction was initially taken up in 1970 by the Central Hydroelectric power construction Board under Ministry of Irrigation and Power as a Central Sector Project. Subsequently, after the formation of N.H.P.C., Project was entrusted to NHPC on 21.1.1978. The project was commissioned in 1982 at a total cost of Rs.148.08 crores. The original installed capacity of the project was 180 MW. Subsequently, it has been increased to 198 MW by up-rating the capacity of each unit to 66 MW through Renovation and Modernization of the Plant during 1991-92.

The foremost redeeming feature of this project was that no human displacement was involved because Baira Siul Project caused submergence of very small area. Its reservoir stretches to only 1.8 KM. The construction, though, necessitated cutting of trees to some extent.

This 540 MW power project, which was commissioned in March, 1994, has also been constructed by the N.H.P.C. Besides environmental loss in the area, involuntary displacement of population has also resulted by the construction of Chamera Dam Project which have large-scale social impacts on the displaced persons.

The 1500 MW Nathpa Jhakri Hydro-electric power project in Shimla district has been constructed by Nathpa Jhakri Power Corporation Ltd. (NJPC), a public sector undertaking under the Ministry of power. It derives its name from the names of two villages in the vicinity—Nathpa (Distt. Kinnaur) and Jhakri (Distt. Shimla) - in the interiors of Himachal Pradesh. While the Project's Dam has been constructed near village Nathpa in District Kinnaur, its power House has been constructed on the left bank of river Satluj at Jhakri in District Shimla. The project stretches over a length of about 50 Kms from the Dam site to the powerhouse. It has 60.50 metres high concrete dam on Satluj river at Nathpa to divert 405 comecs of water through four intakes. Being a diversion Dam, the extent of impoundment and resultant displacement of population or deforestation is minimum.

Hydro-projects are also under construction in Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh. These are being

constructed on Parbati river, which is one of the major tributaries of Beas river and is estimated to have a potential of around 2050 MW. The proposed Parbati Hydro-electric power project is planned to consist of three stages with approximate capacities of 750MW, 800 MW and 500 MW, respectively in the Beas Valley.

The Chamera Hydro-electric Power Project

The Chamera Hydro-electric power Project Dam has been constructed by the N.H.P.C. which generates electricity to the tune of 540 Mega Watt. It is a major project for accelerating development of hydropower in Himachal Pradesh. It is constructed as Indo-Canadian Joint venture by N.H.P.C. Actual construction work of the project was commenced in 1985 and the project was commissioned in March, 1994. The completion cost of the project is Rs. 2114.02 crores. The project comprises 140 metres high concrete dam, a 9.5 meters dia and 6.41 kms long Head Race Tunnel, a 25 M dia and 84 M high surge shaft, a 8.5 metres dia and 157 metres high pressure shaft and an underground Power House housing 3 nos Francis Turbines and generating units of 180 MW each.

Methodology

150 families have been selected for this study. The technique of systematic Random Sampling has been applied for the survey and 25 per cent of the affected families have been covered. List of affected families was obtained from the office of the Relief and Rehabilitation Officer (RRO) of the Chamera Hydro-electric Power Project. A survey approach has been selected as a principal means for data collection from the people affected by the construction of Chamera Hydro-electric power project in Chamba. The interview method was adopted for collecting data which was supplemented by on the spot observations and informal discussions. The data were collected mainly from the head of family who in majority of cases were males, however, the researcher spoke informally to the other persons in the family as well, so as to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Survey has been conducted with the help of a well designed interview schedule. The Interview Schedule has been flexible with some open ended questions having been included in it. All the respondents of the study are from rural area. The youngest respondent in our study was 25 years of age and the oldest 75 years old. The majority of respondents belong to

the age group of 25 to 60 years.

Displacement and Resettlement in Chamera Dam

No study on displacement of people due to construction of dams in Chamba region has so far been conducted, which is what the present study endeavors to do. It is concerned mainly with the aftermath of displacement of people due to the construction of Chamera Dam Project in Chamba.

Number of People Displaced

The magnitude of displacement due to the construction of Chamera Dam is revealed in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Displacement

S. No.	Displacement	No. of Respondents	%age
1	Displaced	90	60
2	Partially displaced	60	40
	Total	150	100

It is clear that out of the total 150 respondents of this study, there are 90 (60%) respondents who have been fully displaced both from their homes and their lands or shops. The remaining 60 (40%) respondents have lost their lands or shops but have not been residentially displaced and continue to live in their earlier homes. So we can infer that a fairly large percentage of people have been fully displaced. Thus, our data show that it is not always necessary and certain that whole communities are fully displaced whenever large dams are built and the dislocation can be partial for some.

Readiness to Vacate their Land/ House

As and when a development project is planned in an area and people come to know about their displacement, often they do not readily agree to vacate their land and house although at times some of them may vacate the area willingly. Our data show that all the 150 (100%) respondents had to vacate their land/house under duress. Thus, people were made to leave their houses and hearths because they felt helpless as there was no other alternative. Some respondents told, *“kafi saman pichhe rah gaya, pani ekdam chhod diya aur hamen bhagana pada”* (Many belongings were left behind because water was released all of a sudden and we had to run).

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Readiness to Vacate their Land/House

S. No.	Category	No. of Respondents	% age
1.	Readily agreed	00	00
2.	Vacated under duress	150	100
	Total	150	100

Loss of Property

When we analyse the data on the 150 respondents, we find that all the respondents suffered the loss of land and 60 per cent, i.e., 90 respondents suffered the loss of house alongwith land. One of the respondents named Kishni (a widow) said, *“pahle jo upjau bhoomi thi aur pakki aamdan ka jaria tha woh chala gaya”* (Previously there was a fertile land which was permanent source of income that has been lost). Another respondent Pritam Singh told, *“Hamari jo zameen ke paise diye the woh bahut kam the. Sara paisa jo mila tha who zameen aur ghar ka samaan kharidane mein khatam ho gaya. Ab kheti ke liye hamare paas zameen bhi nahin hai”* (Money given to us in lieu of land was very less. The whole money was spent on the purchase of land and material for the house. Now, there is no land left with us for cultivation).

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Loss of Property

S. No.	Nature of Loss Incurred	No. of Respondents incurred loss	%age
1.	Loss of land	150	100
2.	Loss of house	90	60

Type of Compensation Given

People have lost their lands, houses, immovable properties and got only cash in lieu of all these properties. The cash has been spent and most people are living without any permanent source of income.

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Compensation Given

S. No.	Category	No. of Respondents	%age
1.	Land given in lieu of land	0	0
2.	Cash given in lieu of land/house	150	100
	Total	150	100

As is evident from Table 4, all the 150 (100%) re-

spondents received cash compensation in lieu of their land/house taken by the dam authorities. It appears that for compensating the loss of people affected by the construction of Chamera Dam, cash payment seemed to be the easiest way to the authorities. And so all the dispossessions, be it of land or house or other assets owned by the affected of the area, were compensated by cash as the authorities were able to convince the affected people to accept the cash compensation for all their losses. The result was that the oustees spent the amount of compensation on purchase of land, construction of house, consumer goods or on marriages, education and other ceremonies rather than ensuring permanent income for the family. It is seen that with the compensation amount awarded under the existing land acquisition laws, usually a pittance, the affected people are in no position to buy replacement assets or means of generating income on a sustainable basis. As such, cash compensation as an income restoration measures often fails to benefit the affected people. Respondents pointed out that, "*Zameen ke badle zameen dene ka vada kiya tha lekin zamin nahin mili aur uske badle paisa hi diya, jo kharch ho gaya*" (Land was promised to be given for land but no land was given and it was compensated by money, which has been spent).

Jobs Promised and Jobs Given

When construction began, the Chamera Dam project authorities had promised that a member of each affected family would be provided job in the project according to their qualification and skill. We have tried to ascertain how many of them have been given jobs.

Table 5. Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Jobs Promised and Jobs Given

S. No.	Category	No. of Respondents	%age
1.	Jobs promised	150	100
2.	Jobs given	66	44
	Skilled:	23	15.33
	Unskilled:	43	28.67

Table 5 shows that only 66 respondents have been given jobs in the project as against their promise to give jobs to at least one person of the affected families according to their educational qualifications. It is clear that the project authorities did not keep their promise and only 44 per cent have been

able to get jobs. Out of these 66 persons, only 23 persons, i.e., 15.33 per cent have been given jobs involving skills. People say, "*Pahle kaha tha ki ek pariwar main ek aadmi ko naukri denge. Interview bhi ho gaye lekin baad main naukri nahin mili*" (Job for a member of each affected family was promised by the authorities, for which interviews were held. But no job provided so far). Thus, the authorities have not kept their promise and many are still without job or other benefits.

Market Value of Compensation Amount

It was also important to know whether or not adequate compensation was provided to the affected population. This was gauged by asking the respondents whether they felt that the value of compensation given to them was less than, equal to or more than market value. Regarding the amount of compensation given to the respondents, 97 (64.67%) persons felt that the amount given as compensation was less than market value whereas 50 (33.33%) said that they know nothing about the value. Only 3 (2%) respondents felt that the amount of compensation given was equal to the market value. Since the majority of respondents perceived that the compensation given to them was less than market value they feel cheated at the hands of authorities. Most of the respondents told, "*Hamari zameen badi upjau thi aur uske badle main hamain bahut kam paisa mila*" (We had a very fertile land and the money we received in lieu of that was very meagre).

Table 6. Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Reaction About Compensation Amount

S. No.	Category	No. of Respondents	% age
1	Less than market value	97	64.67
2	Equal to market value	3	2
3	More than market value	-	
4	Don't know	50	33.33
	Total	150	100

Thus, it is quite evident from the above discourse that people have suffered a lot due to the construction of Chamera Dam Project, though there have been some gains as well.

Conclusion

Thus, we have seen that despite some gains, there

are many adverse impacts of the construction of Chamera Dam Project as revealed by the respondents of this study. It is evident that a large majority of resettlers have been impoverished. The resettlement process has been stressful and the people have lost much of their cultivated land and access to common property. Before the construction of Chamera Dam Project, the authorities made certain promises to the people of the area with regard to the restoration of green cover, providing land in lieu of land, allotment of house sites for the families rendered houseless and providing jobs to one member of each affected family. However, the promises made were not kept.

Despite the promises made by the authorities to rehabilitate them properly with suitable compensation. This fact was well known to the then Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, who while addressing the first meeting of State level Chamera Project Oustees Rehabilitation Advisory Committee on 3rd February, 1986, said that, "Himachal does not have happy experience so far as the rehabilitation of people who have willingly sacrificed their homes and hearths for the construction of Hydro-electric Power Projects like Bhakra and Pong Dam". He also said that the Chairman, NHPC and his colleagues would appreciate his keenness in ensuring adequate rehabilitation facilities for the people of the state who were being dispossessed of their land and whose homes were being acquired. These families deserve most sympathetic treatment and all considerations at the hands of the N.H.P.C. Therefore, it was suggested by the Chief Minister that in addition to land for land, the oustees families may be given some rehabilitation grant as well. Besides these, the new settlement colonies were supposed to be provided with basic infrastructural facilities like drinking water, roads, schools, hospitals, electricity etc. and this expenditure would form part of the Project expenditure. Employment was also to be given to the members of the oustee families.

All the affected families were unaware of the details of rehabilitation programme. The majority of people feared that they would not be given built houses or land for the construction of house. They would get only cash compensation for the loss of land and house and that too at much lower rates. And that is what actually happened. After eight long years the matter regarding the allotment of land to the landless/ houseless oustees was again

discussed in the meeting of Chamera Oustees Committee held on 26-8-1994 under the Chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner, Chamba in which the chairman apprised the members that Government land for allotment to the oustees was not available in Chamba District, hence difficulties for the allotment of land to them was being experienced by the District Administration.

Some respondents told, we were told that one member of each affected family would be provided job in the project and 30% shops in the project colony would be given to the persons who suffered due to the construction of Chamera Dam. But no person in our family got job or any shop in the colony. Thus, the project authorities did not keep their promise. Another respondent, Sh. Jalam Singh said, it was said that land would be provided for the construction of house and timber will also be given at the subsidized rates. But later, the promise was not kept and we were given neither land for the house construction nor the timber. However, the persons who have been given jobs by the project authorities feel satisfied to some extent.

The fact of the matter is, that there has not been any definite policy of the Government and in the absence of such policy, people were made to suffer due to the ill-planned, badly executed, inadequate and inappropriate rehabilitation programme. The law to specifically deal with the resettlement issues also does not exist in India. What exist are mainly laws to regulate the acquisition of privately owned land. Affected people should always be included in the options assessment process as full participants. The decision to build a large dam should only be based on an open and transparent option assessment process in which relevant stakeholders are fully informed of the risks involved.

Keeping in view the above points, some suggestions are offered. As the mega hydel projects result in submergence of large tracts of fertile lands, displace villages falling under the catchment area, involve huge expenditure as difficult terrains to be negotiated, the state of Himachal Pradesh should now concentrate on the mini-and-micro hydel projects. It may be more beneficial, both economically and environmentally, to construct large number of small dams in the catchment areas of rivers. Such projects may cost less and may also prove more beneficial in the long run.

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Conflict of Interest

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