

Book Review

Mathur, H.M (eds). 2008. *India: Social Development Report 2008 Development and Displacement*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

India: Social Development Report 2008 is the second in the series of reports, published bi-annually by the Council for Social Development. This report is a comprehensive account of the concerns and issues that the development related projects and new legislations in the field of health and education in India opens up. The report is a collection of theme based essays and case studies to illustrate the development policies that the neo liberal India nation state has adopted in the recent times with special reference to project- induced displacement and new legal enactments in relation to people's right to livelihood, education and health. Thematically the report is divided into two sections. Part one deals with various aspects of development and displacement in four sections. Section I outlines the major concerns and issues like human rights dimension of development, displacement and resettlement, critique of state power through Land Acquisition Act 1894, resettlement and rehabilitation policy and measures through benefit sharing and trajectories of different types of mobilization in India with special reference to Narmada Bachao Andolon (NBA) and economically backward states in India, Orissa. Section II discusses the social and cultural impacts of displacement with particular reference to health related concerns of resettled people and displaced women. Section III draws upon the displacement impacts in different project types for instance urban development projects, road sector projects and finally section IV discusses the ways to go forward. Part II is a review of the social development activities over the past two years in terms of Right to Information Act, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, common school system in Bihar and news issues in the health sector.

What makes this report interesting is the way it weaves the case studies and situates them in the current debates on development issues. The first essay by Upendra Baxi sets the tone of the report through his discussion on "idea of development" and "developmentalism". The idea of development implies improvement of a given state of affairs but it is never clear what constitutes "improvement". "Developmentalism" implies "the power of the globally emergent epistemic priesthood, which enhances the domination of official mindset (of political leadership / parties/regimes, as well as specialized technocrats), directed to install the exigent, and almost always expedient, truths about/ of development". The report through various case studies on project related displacements and various legislations reveal how the truths about development are presented to people as "human rights friendly acts" where the state represents itself as serving the idea of progress. The state and law joins hands to produce a combined narrative of

progress and inevitably monopolizes means and ends of development in the name of public interest and the case of Land Acquisition Act 1894 is a tool that invests the state with the power to acquire private land for public purpose. Usha Ramnathan in her analysis of LAA 1894 argues that “the absence of any forum to challenge the state’s understanding of what constitutes the public purpose has encouraged it to presume, and exercise, power over land in its territory as if that power were absolute”. She also points out that the law does not acknowledge mass displacement which again reinstates Upendra Baxi’s claim of state monopoly of means and ends of development through legal means. Despite the various initiatives over the past twenty years the struggle for a just resettlement and rehabilitation policy continues. Shekhar Singh in his essay on “Towards a Just Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy” argues that the strength and appropriateness of a policy could be assessed from five parameters mainly whether it discourages involuntary or forced displacement, what is the definition of “displaced”, the justness of the compensation and mitigation package, the participatory and efficiency of the rehabilitation process and how realistically implementable are the provisions. Despite these measures he points out that there are certain challenges that cannot be overlooked. In India 250 -300 million people still live below the poverty line. He argues when project affected people are rehabilitated along with communities who live below poverty line social tensions are bound to rise from control over natural resources to livelihood crisis. Michael M. Cernea takes the debate on resettlement slightly further and argues resettlement should be seen as a way to improve people’s lives through a thorough “content – definition of capacity” which will involve a combination of “institutional” and “financial” capacity for resettlement. He emphasizes on the benefits that a economic perspective on resettlement process and planning from generating resources for resettlement to mechanisms of benefit sharing which will pave way for looking at resettlement not as compensatory but participatory process between the state, project affected people and the developers. Section I concludes with a fascinating essay by T.K. Oommen who argues that the studies on protests against displacement has produced a gap in the research on social movements. T.K Oommen argues that the “research on sociology of social movements (which needs to be distinguished from psychological accounts of social movements)” did not pose the question as to what kind of research will produce usable knowledge for those whom lead social movements. So they produced a ‘sociology of social movements’, but did not produce a ‘sociology for social movements’. But in the field of research on social policy, there has been an attempt to use social policies as instruments of conflict management and negotiation producing a sociology *for* social policy rather than sociology *of* social policy. T.K. Oommen argues current research studies indicate a trend to move towards sociology *for* protest movement and sociology *of* displacement policy as both complement each other and he explains this through a detailed case study of Narmada Bachao Andolon.

Section II discusses the various dimensions and impacts of displacement from four different perspectives. Walter Fernandes in his essay on sixty years of development induced displacement in India provides how in the name of “national” development there has been immense dislocation in people’s lives in various states and how it has produced marginalization. He gives a thorough account of the extent and proportion of private and common land acquired in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Orissa and West Bengal over the last sixty years. Felix Padel and Samarendra Das highlight one of the less focused areas of study on impacts of displacement, i.e., cultural genocide that displacement produces. They argue that displacement results in tearing apart every part of the social structure (the economic system, kinship system, religious system, material culture) that is crucial to any culture of a community. Satish Kedia highlights the nutrition and health impacts of the Tehri Dam displacees to highlight one of the inevitable problems that displacement to a new environment leads to. He shows how the entire lifestyle of the Garhwali people changed particularly their dietary pattern as in the resettlement area they had to depend on market products. In addition to that, though they were accustomed to consuming the milk and eggs produced by animals, they were now forced to sell them for cash instead. This shows that displaced people in areas of resettlement are forced to alter their dietary patterns and often this leads to deprivation and lack of nutritious diet. Ritu Dewan in her analysis on development projects and displaced women argues that “gendered analysis” is isolated from ‘general’ literature on ‘development’-induced displacement and such isolation is bound to reinforce patriarchy as situations of displacement tends to intensify patriarchal rigidities due to insecurity and alteration in socio- economic roles. Section III is an extension of how various kinds of displacement affects people. Dunu Roy in his discussion on the impact of urban development projects presents a critique of development discourse that has produced urbanization. According to him, Delhi slum evictions over the last five years have displaced 300,000 people and the land has been used to build hotels, flyovers etc but there has been no attempt to build public housing for the poor. He presents a critique of the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNURM). He argues a new model of governance is emerging through such renewal attempts more than effective benefits of such development activities. Similarly, in the case of road sector projects, Surinder Aggarwal and Mohammad Zaman through four case studies of road connectivity shows the adverse impact of road projects on women: loss of access to common property resources, loss of livelihood, decline in social status and weakening/breakdown of informal social networks and support systems and finally the lack of dialogue in road planning and its impact on social development. The last essay of this section on “Conservation-induced displacement in India’s Protected Areas” by Mahesh Rangarajan and Ghazala Shahabuddin throws up an interesting issue of how people in these protected areas have moved from access to lands to

being landless. The concluding section of Part I of the report presents ways to go forward.

Part II of the book through a review of the Right to Information Act and National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme presents an ongoing transformation of the way these new legislations are more than law. Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Suchi Pande argue that “RTI is a process, a tool, a concept, and a cultural approach to life” and how it is a stepping stone to equal sharing of power. Ashok K. Pankaj in the essay on National Rural Employment Guarantee Act highlights the main features and discusses implementation strategy over the past two years. The last section focuses on the developments in the field of education and health.

To sum up, the report is an excellent review of the development initiatives that the state has adopted in the recent past and how it has impacted the lives of the people. The report presents a holistic approach to “development” process by integrating and bringing in effective legislations like RTI and NREGA and how major “development” projects have led to displacement. One of the common threads that runs across the essays is to argue for participatory development planning and implementation of effective development policies so that power struggle over sharing and control over resources is minimized.

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