GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT INDUCED RESETTLEMENT: 
A CASE STUDY OF TARBELA DAM RESETTLEMENT IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Any-mega development project, such as the Tarbela Dam, causes significant dislocation and relocation to human populations. The Tarbela Dam project involved relocation of more than 95,000 people. Besides housing, this relocation caused numerous social, economic, and cultural problems. This study was conducted in order to uncover a gender perspective on the Tarbela Dam relocation. This study employs a qualitative-ethnographic research design in order to collect data from the Tarbela Dam affectees. The location of the study was that of relocated communities in districts Haripur, Mansehra and Swabi. Data was collected through interview, FGD and observation. The study found that relocation has caused significant changes in women’s dress code, marriage patterns and education.

Keywords

Resettlement, Tarbela Dam, gender and development, mega development project
Introduction

*Dams and Resettlement*

Dams are artificial structures built to seize natural flowing water, mostly rivers, for different purposes. Since known history, dams have been constructed for the purpose of irrigation, as well as drinking usage for humans and animals, at huge monetary cost, involving arduous human labour. In recent times, with the invention of electric power, an additional purpose of power generation has also been included. As far as the history of dam construction is concerned, it is one of the most fascinating subjects of study as it provides a comprehensive historical overview, not just of dams, right from ancient civilizations, like Babylonian, Egyptian, Indus and Chinese, through the first millennium, the middle ages, and the 20th century to the present, but it also informs us about various aspects of social, cultural, religious, and economic lives. Briefly speaking, there are four types of dams that include buttress dams, embankment dams, gravity dams and arch dams. The world has seen a consistent improvement in dam construction throughout history.

The construction of dams and the selection of sites for construction pose a variety of challenges. Among these, in addition to procurement and control of sufficient human and fiscal resources, the most challenging is resettlement of populations that already live on the chosen sites. As far as resettlement is concerned, one simple definition is that “it is a method of shifting residents from a project site to a new place and compensating them for their losses such as houses, land and agriculture” (Bui & Schreinemachers 2011, 771). As the following paragraphs show, the practical reality of this simple-sounding definition poses complex challenges that are sensitive, with long-term social and political implications.

The construction of a new dam, although a source of socioeconomic development, is almost always a big disaster for the community in proximity. It causes permanent dislocation, relocation, and resettlement of the community (Lee et al. 2014). This relocation is one of the big problems in dam construction, as construction of any new dam needs a huge area for its reservoir and other structures. For example, the surface area of the Tarbela Dam is 250 sq. km. (White, R. (2001,163) and the Three Gorges Dam in China over 1000 sq. km. In order to build such large-scale reservoirs, people and artefacts on the project site have to be moved and relocated. Compensation for resettlement is an essential part of large dam projects now.

Dams in Pakistan

The case of one of the proposed dams, Kala Bagh Dam,¹ which is still a controversial issue best illuminates the deep-rooted challenges that have to be addressed. The Awami National

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¹ Kala Bagh is the name of a place in Pakistan and proposed name for a dam at that site.
Party (ANP)\(^2\) of Khyber Pakhtukhwa and other nationalist parties in Sindh and Balochistan opposed the construction of this dam, considering it to be detrimental to the interests of the people of these three provinces. On the other hand, political parties from the Punjab and other non-nationalist parties do not see the construction of dam as detrimental to anyone’s interest. It is still under consideration for the government to build the Kala Bagh Dam and get control over energy crises in the current scenario. The potential capacity of the dam is 3600 MW while the current situation is one of 7,000 MW shortfall. (Ghazanfar 2008). Because the workers of the Awami National Party (ANP) are emotional in this matter, the president of the party, addressing a huge gathering in a park inCharsadda,\(^3\) a city in central Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said that nobody could dare build the controversial Kala Bagh Dam. He argued that it would dislodge their children, destroy their future and turn their fertile lands into deserts. He warned that people would prevent all such moves with full force (Kala Bagh Dam, 2014, November 24).

After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, construction of dams was one of the key agendas for the government. Among the 150 large dams in Pakistan, Tarbela Dam is the largest dam, constructed in the 1960s in the Hazara region of Pakistan. It is the largest earth-filled dam in the world while the second largest in terms of volume. Mirani Dam in Kach, Balochistan, Pakistan, is the largest dam in the world in terms of flood protection. Mangla Dam, also in that province, was constructed in 1967. A large number of dams (66) are located in Balochistan, while only three have been built in the Federal Administered Tribal Area (FATA). There are 24 large dams in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the Tarbela Dam, Warsak Dam, Tanda Dam and the Khanpur Dam. The Punjab also has 33 dams, including the Ghazi Barotha Dam and the Rawal Dam. At least four dams are located in the Sindh province of Pakistan.

**Tarbela Dam and Resettlement in Pakistan**

The Tarbela Dam project was one of the mega-dam projects of the 1960s and 70s in Pakistan. As said above, it is the world’s largest earth-filled dam and also the largest dam in the world in terms of structural size. Its stated objective was to bring development to the country by providing a source of hydro energy, irrigation base and flood control. It was built on the river Indus between Swabi and Haripur regions. Its construction was started in 1964, but it started operations ten years after in 1974. As mentioned above, it has a surface area of 250 sq. km., resulting in the dislocation of over 96 thousand people, 135 villages and the princely state of Amb (Terminski 2013).

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\(^2\) The Awami National Party is a Pushtun nationalist political party, established in 1986. It is very active in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

\(^3\)Charsadda is a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province situated at the North of Peshawar.
Those affected by the project were relocated into three township schemes—namely Kalabut, Kangra and New Darband—and two hamlets—namely Pehur and Ghazi (Official document on Resettlement, 2014: 1-15). The process of relocation seems very simple and straightforward on paper: take the people out of their houses, select a new location, construct townships there, allocate the houses to the affectees and provide them some compensation. However, the process is more complex and requires attention to not only engineering and housing aspects of resettlement but to cultural and human needs as well. Owing to a lack of national resettlement policy, the resettlement was conducted on an ad hoc basis with little concern over cultural and social after-shocks of such resettlement.

Literature review

Large dams contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of countries around the world (Castelan 2010, 164; Takesada 2009, 419). The concept of damming water is very old. Some researchers, such as Biswas and Tortarda (2001) and Altinbilek (2002) traced the history of dams to 5000 years ago in the Middle East where water was stored for human and animal drinking purposes and channelled to arid lands for irrigating crops. It was the 17th Century Industrial Revolution that added another purpose to damming water—generating energy (Altinbilek 2010). In the 20th Century, many multi-purpose dams were built including dams for flood control, generating power and irrigation (Biswas and Tortarda 2001; Altinbilek 2010). The International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) estimated that by the end of the previous century, there were almost five hundred thousand dams worldwide (1999). For engineers, a dam that is higher than 15 meters is a large dam. From this definitional standpoint, there are about 40 thousand large dams in the world today (Brown and Jackson 2009).

In the modern world, large dams are considered a symbol and a source of national development. They are considered one of the indicators of development and a country’s development/status is determined on the basis of water reservoirs. It results in the development of infrastructure and overall life. In addition, mega-dams result in generating electricity that works like lifeblood and is a boon to modern technology.

Besides its enormous advantages, a large dam also comes with a price. It brings significant changes in an ecosystem, as well as physical and social structures. One of the most significant impacts is dislocation of many households and communities. The World Bank and the ICOLD reported that the world is witnessing a dislocation of more than 10 million people owing to dam construction (Moigne et al. 1989). For example, Fujikura (2009) reported that 9,600 people were dislocated in Sri Lanka owing to Kotmale Dam construction (p. 415). Akca et al. (2013) reported that more than three hundred thousand people were dislocated in Turkey owing to construction of numerous dams (p.101). Brown
Gender and Development Induced Resettlement (2010) reported that more than 56 thousand people were dislocated in China owing to construction of the Bingzhongluo Dam (p.785). Nakayama (2010) reported that over 27 thousand people were dislocated in Indonesia because of the Cirita Dam (p. 444). In Vietnam, more than 200 thousand people were dislocated in damming projects (Bui & Scheinemachers, 2011, 769), and the Three-Gorges Dam in China dislocated over a million people (Xu, et al. 2011, 518). The Tarbela Dam project in Pakistan caused a dislocation of more 96 thousand people (Terminski 2013). Looking at numerous dislocations in damming projects, Cernea (1999) and Bisht (2009) asserted that almost one million people annually are dislocated because of large dam projects. With the foregoing in view, designers of large dam projects have started realizing the problems of on-site people and have launched resettlement programmes to mitigate affectees’ suffers.

Objectives of the Study

More precisely, the study looks into the following objectives:

- to understand the perception of the resettlers (both men and women) regarding their adjustment to the new areas;
- to find out the problems discouraging their adjustment to the new areas;
- to understand the impacts of their resettlement on their future generations.

Methodology

This is an ethnographic study, employing in-depth interviewing, focused group discussion, and field observation as data collection techniques. The reason behind employing qualitative methodology is to find in-depth information regarding adjustment issues of the resettlers which other techniques could not uncover. The data were collected from both rural and urban resettlers, rural being New Darband\(^4\) Township in district Mansehra,\(^5\) Pehur Hamlet\(^6\) in district Swabi,\(^7\) and Ghazi\(^8\) hamlet in district Haripur,\(^9\) while the urban resettlers are in Kangra\(^10\) Township and Kalabut\(^11\) Township.

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\(^4\) Darband village is situated 61 kilometers west of district Mansehra.
\(^5\) Mansehra is the name of a city/ district in KP and 115 km north of Islamabad.
\(^6\) Pehur is a small village between Tarbela and Gadoon (village) Industrial Estate, district Swabi, KP.
\(^7\) Swabi is the name of a city/ district in KP located 111 km north of Islamabad.
\(^8\) Ghazi is a title given to Muslim warriors or champions. It is the name of a village in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, near the site of the Tarbela Dam and the Ghazi Barotha Dam. It is situated 25 kilometers north-east of district Haripur.
\(^9\) Haripur is the adjacent city to the Tarbela Dam situated 62 km north of Islamabad.
\(^10\) Kangra is the name of a township situated 60 km north of Islamabad.
\(^11\) Kalabut is the name of a township situated 65 km north of Islamabad.
Sampling and Nature of Respondents

To get entry to all such townships and hamlets and to study them in depth was rather difficult. Therefore, it was decided to select 10 males, and 10 female individual respondents from each township/hamlet. Furthermore, two focus group discussions (FGDs) from each township/hamlet were organized containing 7 to 12 respondents. The sample selected consisted of 50 males, and 50 female respondents, 100 in total. Total numbers of participants in FGDs were 96 in total (See Table 01). Respondents from each township and hamlet were selected based on the researcher’s judgment.

Table 01 Showing Sample Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No</th>
<th>Name of Town and Hamlet</th>
<th>Number of Male respondents</th>
<th>Number of female respondents</th>
<th>Number of FGD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kalabut Township (Haripur)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kangra Township (Haripur)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>New Darband Township (Mansehra)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ghazi hamlet (Haripur)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pehur hamlet (Swabi)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnographic approach

Traditionally, ethnography has been used by anthropologists to study human culture. With expansion of the social sciences, other fields, such as sociology, also started using the ethnographic method in research. To anthropologists, such as Spradley (1979, 3), “ethnography is the work of describing a culture. Ethnography, which literally means ‘writing about the people’, is a research strategy that involves both participation and observation”. This study demanded an observation of the problems faced by resettlers and their experiences as described by them in formal and informal conversations. In order to study such a phenomenon, an ethnographic approach was best suited.
For participant observation, I lived with each of these communities for three months, observing the routine lives of their inhabitants, along with conducting formal and informal interviews with potential informants.

Pilot visit of target area

My first visit was to district Haripur, where I met with a few influential people and developed good relations with them in three days. Then I met the President of Social Mobilization for Tarbela affectees (SMT), a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Kalabut Township, Haripur, who was a key informant for the proper planning of interviews. After the Kalabut visit, I visited Kangra Township, Haripur for two days and searched for a place to reside and to start my proper work.

Practical fieldwork in the target area

For the fieldwork, I hired a female research assistant to conduct interviews of 50 female respondents and also to ensure that she would help me in joint FGDs, having both male and female participants in the field, consisting of three districts, Haripur, Swabi, and Mansehra. Parallel to proper data collection, the observation process and point noting in the field are also crucial; one needs help to sustain and maintain quality work. Throughout the fieldwork, all the interviews were recorded with prior permission of the respondents. Each spoken word was carefully recorded to capture all the cultural nuances while also noting down and not missing the body language of the respondents. After the completion of data collection, it was translated into English, interpreted and analysed.

Transcription, interpretation/presentation and analysis of the data

After completion of the interviews, the audio-recorded data were transcribed. After each interview, the audio quality was checked and was transcribed wordy by word. Then, I translated all interviews from Pashto, Urdu, and Hindko to English very carefully. After the completion of transcription, interpretation of data was carried out.

Limitations of the study

The most pressing limitation on the study was time consumption. Time was required for taking permission from the district administration to carry out field work, along with finding suitable respondents and their consent to participate in the study. Further, I was able to visit only three townships and two hamlets. However, many of the resettlers reside out of these resettlement locations all over Pakistan. While the current figure represents fairly a broad variety of demographic and interest groups, the respondents in the five
townships/hamlets who participated in this study may not fully represent the voice and interest of project-affected people residing all over Pakistan and abroad.

Results and Discussion

*Pardah system: Loss of Pardah (Veil) system*

The *Pardah* system was an issue in the adjustment of resettlers in the new area. Women led a comfortable life in their native place because they belonged to the same clan and village. Hence, there were fewer restrictions on women. They were leading a happy life in the village because there they went to river bank, visited neighbours and enjoyed festivals which were exclusively for females. The village life for them was the second name of freedom because they were used to it. Likewise, there was less stress on observing *Pardah* in the village.

After they shifted to the new area, they got mixed up with the new community who were, in a sociological sense, alien to them. The resettlement policy did not provide residence to a whole village in a single location; rather, extended families were divided and were given residence in a scattered pattern. If one unit of the extended family was given residence in Haripur, the other was allocated housing in the Punjab. In this way, the collective communities were divided and dispersed. People in new townships got new neighbours who were mostly unknown to them. Hence, the male members restricted females to houses and put restrictions on visiting their neighbours. A majority of the female respondents were not happy in this respect. According to one female respondent,

more or less 40 years have passed but we have not received the right to visit our neighbours by our own choice on a daily basis, until and unless, there is an important function in the neighbourhood. Our male family members, back in the village, allowed us to attend functions, while here we are strictly restricted to our household boundaries. Now, there are no festivals or river banks in this township. We spend our lives like show pieces in the house. We miss our relatives and childhood friends. Therefore, most of the women are quite unhappy due to the displacement. During the displacement almost all of the women went through trauma. (Individual interview at Kalabut Township).

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12 *Pardah*, an Urdu (national language of Pakistan) word, means the custom, found in some Muslim and Hindu cultures, of keeping women from being seen by men they are not related to, by having them live in a separate part of the house or behind a curtain, and wear clothing that covers the whole body, including the face.
Not only did the respondents in their statements refer to this painful fact, but I personally observed it in both townships. Women, in particular, felt quite uncomfortable in Kalabat Township despite their resettlement there for almost 40 years.

It was a longer span of time without good physical exertion, fresh water, vegetables, fruits and dairy products, items that were previously available in their very houses that they never had to buy from the market. Similarly, females in the villages used to work with their own hands, for example, activities like washing clothes on a washing pad at the riverbank or water channel near their homes. They would bake several items for family members and would remain busy mostly in daily routine work. However, displacement snatched all these blessings from them. Physical exertion was much less and they were also restricted to household boundaries. All such factors collectively made them easy prey to different diseases.

On the other hand, the new generation of females was comparatively active, adjusted, less strict in practicing Pardah (in the case of females) and well-groomed according to the new culture. They were enrolled in colleges and universities and used simple chaddar\textsuperscript{13}—the veiling practiced by the local people—while the resettled women still used Burqa\textsuperscript{14}—the veiling commonly practiced in their previous villages.

**Wedding ceremonies: From collective marriages to individual marriage system**

In addition to a change in the Pardah system, the pattern of wedding ceremonies also changed due to displacement. There used to be simple wedding functions in the villages. Wealthy people normally supported poor people in their weddings by buying rice or meat or giving them some cash. The hosts would invite relatives for making preparations such as getting the rice and flour ready for cooking and cutting the meat for the wedding feast. They were small functions, but they tied the neighbourhood people together to share their love with one another.

But after displacement, the resettlers lost all such functions and experienced a cultural shock. In the townships, the wedding ceremonies and patterns were altogether different as the wedding halls changed the overall local cultures, traditions and social ties among them. The presence of such halls was due to small houses which were not large enough to entertain all the guests. Such arrangements were expensive; however, people had

\textsuperscript{13}Chadar is an Urdu word referring to the traditional garment of Muslim and Hindu women, consisting of a long, usually black or dab colored, cloth or veil that envelopes the body from head to foot and covers all or part of the face.

\textsuperscript{14}Burqa is a Persian word, meaning an envelope of stitched cloth which covers the female from head to feet.
no other option. On the other hand, in the villages they had big houses which could easily accommodate many people. In the townships, the poor people who could not afford the expense of the wedding halls held their marriage ceremonies in the streets. The same streets were also used for other functions and games.

**Problems in Education: From good to better**

Getting education is the basic right of every individual. Before moving to the new area, people were not fully aware of the importance of education for males and females. Education of male family members was the top priority, while females were considered good for cooking, cleaning and other domestic chores. Young girls were not given much importance. Females were usually neglected, not only in education, but also in decision-making processes in the house. Male children were given more importance and authority as compared to female children. A female respondent in Ghazi hamlet, in a one-to-one interview, said that,

> when we were in our old town, our males treated us like animals. We were slaves for them and they just gave us food for survival. If we wished for something, that would reject it right away. Our jurisdiction was limited in decision-making, even in making choices regarding our personal lives. Sometimes we could not speak a single word in front of our husbands even though we knew that it was beneficial to the family. We were not valued in the house.

But resettlement changed trends in education in the two townships (Kalabut and Kangra), both towns being situated near an urban area. While Ghazi, Pehur hamlets and New Darband Township had problems in education due to their resettlement in rural areas, I observed that female education was given more importance in both towns. There were females in colleges and universities as well. People in towns were more inclined towards female education. A female respondent in Kalabut Township expressed her views:

> I was illiterate in my native place and our males did not favour female education. Male members of the family used us as decoration pieces in the house and made us work like machines. But moving introduced us to a new wave of female education. Now all females are enrolled in schools, colleges and universities. So much so, if a daughter wants to get higher education abroad, we send her abroad. (FGD)

People in the townships realized that without education their children’s future was not safe. Therefore, they all sent their children to the best schools, colleges and universities for a better education. They realized the importance of education, which turned out to be the biggest change in their lives. In the past, they could not complete their education because
of a hard life style. No one offered jobs to them because they could not meet the eligibility criteria of academic qualifications or experience. Furthermore, they lacked technical skills; hence, they could not get any job. It was only when they realized that without education their lives were useless, then they began to focus more on education.

**Conclusion**

The study concludes that the loss of veiling (*Pardah*) was an important reason for the resettlers’ non-adjustment in their new areas. Females would observe limited veiling (*Pardah*) in the native place because almost everyone was a relative or was well-known, and they all belonged to one ethnic group. Therefore, veiling (*Pardah*) to ensure gender segregation was not very strictly observed. Furthermore, in the native place they were free to visit their neighbours next door to socialize with them and engage in other neighbourhood affairs.

Resettlement changed this pattern significantly. After resettlement in the new area, females were restricted to their homes because in the new area there was no river bank. They used tap water for drinking and washing clothes. There were no forest woods, so they used kerosene oil or gas for making fire. There was no agriculture or free land for kitchen gardening, so they bought vegetables from the market, unlike getting them for free in their villages. They had no agricultural land to cultivate. Although they had neighbours, they had no relations or even poor relations with one other, even after many decades of resettlement.

This changed lifestyle all came about because of a change in veiling culture. Now veiling became an essential element of the culture of resettlers. Regarding veiling, it is essential to mention that the veil is used by females to segregate themselves from strangers. It’s a protective robe that females wear in order to show others that they are from respectable families and are not available for strangers to socialize with. The strong observance of veiling caused all those changes in the resettlers’ life. Most of the research participants of this study were still in emotional and psychological shock because of the changes. Therefore, resettlement had a big psychological and social impact on the lives of females after they shifted to new areas.

The resettlers’ indigenous wedding ceremonies pattern also changed after resettlement. In the native place, they had a traditional style of wedding. They invited their relatives to the wedding house for a few days; different tasks were assigned to different relatives. They enjoyed the ceremony for almost a week. The wedding house received rice, meat, *ghor* (a raw form of sugar) and services in shape of gifts from wealthy people in the village. All villagers were to look after the guests during the wedding days. A wedding in the
native village would bring happiness to the entire village. It was a common responsibility shared by almost the entire village.

But in the new settlements, a significant change was observed in the marriage institution. Now the resettlers lived in narrow streets with less open space for completion of elaborate functions as well as severe time constraints. After resettlement, all relatives were scattered in different parts of the country, making it difficult for them (relatives) to visit each other frequently. So inviting them (relatives) for a wedding for a short time was difficult for them to digest. In the face of wedding ceremonies, now the resettlers had no place to accommodate guests for days in their houses as they use to in their native villages.

Now, the trend was shifting to holding marriages in wedding halls and invitations to relatives was rare. Accommodating guests on wedding occasions, along with arrangement of food and other necessities for them, was extremely difficult for the hosts in the new areas. These functions now required more finances. In the final analysis, weddings have become costlier and tiresome for the resettlers.

It was found that education of both genders was positively influenced by resettlement. However, there was a variation between rural resettlers and resettlers living near cities. The education of the first generation was not influenced by resettlement. Most of the first generation resettlers were illiterate and remained illiterate after resettlement. However, the second and third generation became fonder of education, and now in the third generation, both males and females received education in schools, colleges, and universities.

The reason why the second and third generations received more education than the previous, lies in grounded realities. First generation resettlers could not receive benefit from government schemes of job quotas, as those jobs required selective education and skills. The market economy in the new resettlements also required education and new skills, while their previous job skills were unfit for new realities. Therefore, the second and third generations started attaining higher education in order to meet the needs of the market and ground realities.

However, this positive development in education caused a significant gap between generations. The new generation, according to parents, was not only equipped with modern education and skills, but also adopted modern values and attitudes. They did not pay much regard to elders and/or traditional cultural norms and values. That created a psychological burden for the first generation elders.
Recommendations

- Resettlers must be involved in the planning, designing and implementation stages of resettlement plans.
- Resettlers must be given a choice of resettlement according to their appropriate requirements.
- Resettlement policies must be established and documented in the form of ‘policy guidelines’ for implementation of future resettlement plans.
- The government should plan for the improvement of resettlers’ financial conditions in the new localities.
- Protection of resettlers’ culture and values is also recommended.

Bibliography


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