

# Gender and development-induced displacement: case studies from Zambia and India

by Renu Modi

*While we are becoming aware of the impact of large dams on the lives of marginal peoples, do we know enough about the different effects on men and women?*

**H**ow have women's lives, livelihoods and coping strategies changed by the inundation caused by the construction of Zambia's Kariba Dam and the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on India's Narmada river? Have women benefited from resettlement programmes and been adequately compensated for loss of access to forests, land and other common property resources? Is World Bank resettlement policy as gender-sensitive as it purports to be?

Answers are sought within the framework of the impoverishment risk and reconstruction (IRR) model formulated by Michael M Cernea. The IRR model identifies the major risk factors that cause impoverishment following involuntary resettlement: landlessness, joblessness, loss of access to common property resources, community disarticulation, marginalisation, food insecurity, homelessness and increased morbidity.

The two development-induced displacement and resettlement (DIDR) case studies are separated in time and place. The Kariba hydroelectric project, completed in 1963, is one of the earliest dams commissioned by the World Bank. Designed to exploit the region's industrial potential, the dam displaced about 56,000 people on the Zambezi River's Zambian bank and 31,000 on the Zimbabwean side. The SSP, the largest and the most expensive dam of the Narmada Valley Development Project, has displaced the residents of the valley since the mid 1980s.

The key principles driving the World Bank policy on involuntary resettlement are to:

- avoid and minimise involuntary resettlement wherever possible and explore viable alternatives

- identify trade-offs between dam height and the amount of population displacement planned
- see resettlement as an opportunity for development where living standards can be improved or at least restored to their current standards of living
- consider social factors as an intrinsic part of technical evaluation studies during the cost-benefit analysis of a project.

Research findings highlight the marginalisation of displaced people as a consequence of these and other DIDR projects. They show that:

- those displaced are worse off than they used to be
- transforming farmers and fishermen into wage labourers cannot be described as 'resettlement'
- unequal compensation payments have violated principles of equity and divided hitherto interdependent communities
- resettlement policies have been state-driven and not involved genuine participation of those displaced
- the suffering of women in particular and families in general has not been mitigated either in the case of the SSP or the earlier Kariba project: post-Kariba World Bank's guidelines have not made much difference
- in India the worst burden has fallen on women in *adivasi* (tribal) families
- although they have evolved over the years World Bank DIDR guide



lines have failed to have a transformative potential or a positive impact on women's lives in terms of access to improved infrastructure or land rights.

When the resettlement of the Kariba Dam took place, DIDR discourse paid little attention to concerns for gender equity and justice. By the time of the SSP resettlement this was no longer the case. However, despite growing awareness about social justice by the World Bank policy, the distributional and gendered impact was no better. Equitable outcomes to forced displacement in the name of progress can only be achieved if resettlement policies and their implementation are gender sensitive and work towards women's empowerment.

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For further analysis of development-induced displacement, see *Forced Migration Review 12* the International Network on Displacement and Resettlement ([www.displacement.net](http://www.displacement.net)) and the Friends of River Narmada ([www.narmada.org](http://www.narmada.org)).