JAMUNA BRIDGE PROJECT AND THE DISPLACED: AN ENQUIRY INTO RESETTLEMENT POLICY AND ITS OPERATIONALIZATION PROCESS

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In most cases large scale development projects, both in industrialized and developing countries lead to involuntary population displacement. Until recently development induced displacement was treated in the national and international policy making circles as an unavoidable side effect of greater development goals. Infrastructural components being the major focus of attention, meaningful relocation of the evicted people and reconstructing their livelihood was all along the low priority area of such development projects. Over the years, world-wide experience demonstrated that any kind of involuntary displacement creates a deep sense of insecurity among the displaced. Is causes sudden and hurtful disruption in the pattern of their daily life, dismantles their social network and most importantly induces multifaceted impoverishment. Along with material and social losses of individuals, forced displacement also has the potential to create political problems.

From the early 1970s various studies (Chamber ed 1970, Colson 1971, Ackermann 1973, Hassen and Oliversmith ed1982, Scudder 1985, Cernea 1988, 1990, 1995 and 1996), environmental and human rights activist groups and NGOs have brought the plight of the displaced people to the forefront of development project consideration. New realization which these studies and actions have generated compelled the large scale developers bring about policy changes. Both World Bank and ADB now formally pursue policies of discouraging projects which require involuntary displacement of population. Where displacement is unavoidable, they have agreed to keep provision for adequate compensation, and resettlement of evacuee without compromising their previous economic standard.

A major infrastructure development initiative, currently being undertaken in Bangladesh is Jamuna Multi purpose bridge project. This project also involves involuntary displacement of a large number of people from their original land, both homestead and agricultural. JMBP is the first development project in Bangladesh which has formally endorsed resettlement of the project affected people (PAP) as an integral part of the overall project. It endorsed the idea that the standard of living of project affected persons should be improved or at least they should be able to retain their previous standard of living. Accordingly it has prepared a formal Resettlement Action Plan and from November 1993 the plan is in operation. The Resettlement Action Plan of JMBP is of immense importance, as it is the first of its kind in Bangladesh. There is every likelihood that this plan will have a major influence in developing strategies for future projects. Therefore it is quite pertinent to assess various policy measures envisaged in the plan. This is precisely the purpose of the present study. Aim of this paper is to understand various aspects of the resettlement policy, analyze the process through which such policies are being implemented and examine if there is any gap between the policy and the process.
METHODOLOGY:

Present paper is written on the basis of the preliminary findings of an ongoing study involuntary displacement and resettlement; the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Case, initiated by Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit with financial support of the Bureau of Economic Research Dhaka University. The study has been based on secondary and primary data. Primary data is generated at two levels; interview of the functionaries of key implementing agencies such as Resettlement Unit of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Project, NGOs involved at the field level, World Bank officials etc. and the displaced and resettled persons. Two methodological techniques have been used in generating information from the displaced persons. These are, informal group discussions and in-depth interviews with affected households, randomly selected from those resettled at the resettlement site and self-resettled in surrounding villages. Field findings which are presented in the text are generated from the east bank of the Jamuna river.

THE JMB PROJECT PROFILE AND NATURE OF DISPLACEMENT

The Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Project is funded by International Development Agency, Asian Development Bank and Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) of Japan. The estimated cost of the project is US$ 900m. The bridge will provide direct transport link between north-west and eastern parts of the country. It is meant to end the relative isolation of the agriculturally fertile northwest region of Bangladesh and thus stimulate overall economic growth of the country. 7000 acres of land has to be acquired from its original occupants for this project. The construction of the bridge itself has not caused any land acquisition, it is the construction of the two guide bunds, a hard point and approach roads which involved land acquisition and concomitant displacement. The land acquisition process will affect six unions of two Thanas (Kalihati and Bhuapur) of Tangail district and five unions, one municipal ward of two thanas (Kamarkhand and Sirajgang) of Sirajganj district.

In 1992 BRAC was commissioned to undertake a survey of residual land and project affected persons. The study divided the PAPs into two categories: directly-affected and indirectly-affected. Those who would lose their homestead, land, other assets and hold legal titles of them were considered to be directly affected people. Indirectly affected people were identified as those who would lose their source of income due to project implementation. This included farm and non-farm workers, tenant farmers, squatters and uthulis. The BRAC study suggested that 11,945 households with a population of 77,280 will be affected by the project, directly or indirectly. It further informed that 67.57% of the affected households, would lose their entire homestead land and 67% would lose their entire agricultural land. 34.5% would become completely landless, in terms of both homestead and agricultural land. 15% of the households would have residual agricultural land of .33 acre or more. The remaining would have less than .20 acre of residual agricultural land after land acquisition (Barua 1993). There was, however, a further increase in the number of affected people, during the implementation of the project.
According to the latest available information, 16,341 households, with a net population of about 100,000 have been affected by the project. Among them 3604 households have lost their homestead land entirely. Along side, 32 community facilities, 13 educational institutions, 14 mosques, 2 cemeteries and 1 cooperative building had to be abandoned.

**RESETTLEMENT ACTION PLAN:**

From the inception of the project the potential donors insisted on appropriate compensation and resettlement of the evicted people to be considered as integral part of the project. In view of the fact that donor money would not have been forthcoming without this component, GOB commissioned a Resettlement Action Plan, prepared by Randell Palmer Tritton, NEDECO and Bangladesh Consulting Ltd., (1990). The study, however, underestimated the number of the PAP. On the basis of the findings of the BRAC study formal Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) was prepared in March 1993. Under World Bank’s insistence, it was further revised. In October 1993, the revised resettlement action plan was endorsed. The resettlement work for the JMBP began basing on this Revised Resettlement Action Plan (RRAP). This plan, according to GOB, 'fully accommodated' World Bank’s Resettlement Operation Directive 4.30. The RRAP treated resettlement and rehabilitation of PAP as a separate programme, with its own objectives and budget. It created a separate Resettlement Unit (RU) for managing and supervising the project. The budget of the project is Tk 1632.00 million amounting to 4% of the total JMBP budget. When the October 1993 RRAP was prepared, the final locations of the west guide bund, West bridge end and West bridge corridor, was still uncertain. Therefore, it was decided, “consecutive resettlement actions related to other components of the project will be derived by analogy from the RRAP” (RDM 1997).

Resettlement, under RRAP, has been conceived as a development programme. It upholds that affected people should be compensated for all quantifiable losses at a full replacement cost, compensation should also be paid to people who were affected indirectly, absence of legal title should not be made bar for paying compensation, proper incentive structure should be developed for host-guest integration, resettlement sites has to be prepared on both sides of Jamuna river for those who would not be able to resettle on their own, NGOs will participate in project implementation. Main features of four major aspects of RRAP is discussed below. These are, compensation, resettlement, host village incentive programme and participation of NGOs.

**Compensation**

In RRAP a compensation policy guideline was developed where the categories of losses were defined and entitlements for different types of losses were spelt out. Fourteen categories of PAP have been identified in the RRAP who were entitled to get compensation. These were transfer grants, house construction grants, owner-cultivator grants, farm worker grants, non-farm worker grants, tenant cultivators’ grants, dismantling and removal grants, reconstruction grants for commerce and industry, replacement land stamp duty grants, grants to cover premium, grant to cover maximum
allowable replacement value, grants for *sitobhulis* / squatters to purchase homestead land. People who are entitled for compensation, will be termed as entitled persons (EPs). Under the new arrangement, each of them will be provided with an identity card. To keep the process transparent, a computerized database will be created on each EP. Grievance Redressal Committees will be formed to act as a quasi-judicial body to pass order with respect to dispute over land and ownership over compensation.

The RRAP also made provision to cover the rights of those affected by river erosion or flooding caused by the Bridge Project. A $200m additional loan has been sanctioned by IDA for compensating those persons who have lost or are likely to lose their land, houses and sources of income, due to possible erosion in the area, caused by river training and construction of JMBP. The river erosion and flood related compensation will be paid up to the year 2000. Area covered under this programme stretches from 8 km. upstream and 10 km downstream of the bridge, including mainland and *chars*. Receiving compensation for loss of land due to erosion or flooding will not affect the land title of a person. If land of a compensated person is accreted again in natural way, within thirty years, the owner will be able to regain possession of her/his land. A baseline survey has been undertaken in this area and 28033 families have been registered whose land could be endangered. Compensation process has begun and satellite imageries are used to verify claims in this regard. If any of these households lose homestead they will be entitled to relocate themselves at the resettlement sites. Women headed households of *char* areas will be given 20% more transfer grant.

**Resettlement**

From the time of preparing the preliminary resettlement action plan (1990) the government of Bangladesh agreed that at least half the number of total displaced people will be formally resettled at resettlement sites. This was planned on consideration that it will be extremely difficult for the poor farmers to get themselves resettled on their own due to high density of population and non-availability of land in the area concerned. Accordingly land was acquired on both sides of the Jamuna river. Decision was taken to prepare formal resettlement sites with modern infrastructural support and community facilities.

**Host Village Incentive Programme**

RRAP stipulates that in areas where displaced people and families will resettle, social welfare programme such as health, education will be undertaken by RU of JMBP for the overall development of the area. This will be treated as a part of the resettlement programme. Influx of the displaced people in host villages may cause overloading of the carrying capacity of community facilities. This may also create tension amongst the host communities and the PAPs. In order to ease such tension and to ensure that the host communities do not see PAPs as burden, this package is developed as an incentive structure. In this case development priorities will be decided by the villagers themselves. JMB authority will act as the implementing agency.
NGO participation

Another important policy consideration of JMBP is to involve the non-governmental organizations in implementing the project. Project planners officially recognised the complex nature of resettlement operation requires NGO expertise. It was thought that NGOs will help in building the bridge between JMB and the people. Procedures of involving NGOs have also been envisaged in RRAP. NGOs which are interested to participate in various components of the project, were required to be enlisted with JMB and were asked to compete through bidding. NGOs which would bid the lowest with technical expertise in area concerned will be given the job.

RRAP IN PRACTICE

Operationalization of Compensation Policy

Although the compensation matrix of RRAP was well defined, it was found that the operational procedure of the compensation package was extremely complicated. Two parallel bodies were involved in operationalizing the compensation programme. These are the District Commissioner's office of Tangail and Sirajganj and the RU of JMB. RU is again assisted by an NGO named Rural Development Movement (RDM) in implementing the programme. Although the RRAP came into effect from November 1993, the land acquisition and compensation process for the project began in 1989 under the district administration. JMB authorities after assessing the total requirement of land, passed on the responsibility of land acquisition to the district administration. The district land office is still responsible for assessing the land price. On the basis of assessment the District Commissioner's Office notifies the affected persons, acquires land and pays compensation. In this case DC office is responsible for paying compensation for land, structure and other assets at the rate previously fixed by the district land office. On top of the assessed land price a twenty percent premium was paid to the EP. Once DC has paid the compensation and name of the recipient is recorded in the DC office award book, only then the person concern is eligible for other 11 types of compensation which will be directly paid by the resettlement unit. Resettlement Unit's compensation package processing is also quite tedious. RDM through affected persons identification survey, DC's Award Book and BRAC survey information, identifies the entitled persons (EPs) and issue identity cards in their names. They calculate individual losses, verify entitlement claims and process all papers related to compensation. RU finally issues cheques to the EPs. Till October 1997 56.11% compensation and entitlement have been paid.

It is evident that a single EP may have to process at least 11 types of claim forms for his/her compensation. Moreover, an EP may lose land in more than one place. Therefore, one can see the whole procedure is lengthy and time consuming. Theoretically compensation is paid to the affected persons so that they would be able to replace their lost assets and would not fall into the trap of impoverishment through landlessness, homelessness etc. From the process of payment of compensation it is evident that affected persons did not
receive their compensation at a time, rather over several years, in many installments. Therefore, it can be easily argued that an affected person would not be able to make the best use of the compensation money. From individual interviews it was found that EPs could invest a section of their compensation money in buying land or other productive assets. They also did spend some on wedding, burial, other ceremonies and medical care. Some had mortgaged land. Others stated they incurred debt during displacement and spent a section of compensation money in debt repayment. An important information came from a group discussion that during the time when payment of compensation was at its peak vested quarters arranged gambling sessions in the area and many EPs gambled with the money.

Some EPs felt that the District Land Office’s policy regarding land price fixation went against them. In order to pay less registration fee a common practive in Bangladesh is to undervalue the property. But the method followed to determine the land price for compensation was based on the average of the registered sale price of a few plots of a Mouza. As such compensation amount fixed was much lower than the actual market price of the land. Moreover, interviewees alleged that land price fixation method was also beset with corruption. Almost all the interviewees paid 7-10% of the total compensation money as bribe. If such payment was not made land in question would likely be undervalued. The rate would go higher when PAP lacked necessary papers. Likewise land could be overvalued by paying higher rates. In one instance compensation rate varied between two brothers with similar holding because of bribe. In the hardpoint area some people could not avail compensation package. They were told that their land fell under vested property act. But they claimed that they had legal documents and have been paying taxes regularly. Interestingly, one of the three brothers from this family could avail compensation.

RU/RDM’s compensation payment process was reportedly to be generally transparent. No complaint was heard about the practices of irregular payments and middlemen. An EP whose name is enlisted in the DC Award Book does not have much problem in receiving various grants which he is entitled to. But in case of RDM/RU as well, an EP has to come several times for processing compensation claims. However, it created less inconvenience since it did not involve going to district towns. Instances were of course encountered where EPs claimed to have received less premium or other grant than his entitlement. A section of EPs have not been able to avail transfer grant, house construction grant, one time cash grant, dismantling and removal grant. This is because RDM/RU only processes such claims when a person’s name is registered in the DC’s Award Book. These EPs in order to avoid frequent visits to the DC’s office by every family member authorised one person to follow-up on the entitlements. Once the compensation money was received they distributed among themselves according to their share of property. RDM cannot honour their subsequent claims as the their names were not registered in the DC Office Award Book. This implies that people were not made aware about the technicalities of compensation process.

In general, relatively poorer EPs could not avail two types of compensation. These are grants to cover MARV and stamp duty. When a person buy a replacement land which
costs more than the DC office compensation and premium, he is entitled to receive MARV. Stamp duty is paid to homestead losers and agri land losers, when they purchase replacement land. In both these cases a person has to buy the land first, get his papers ready, bring the seller at the time registration, only then he can avail those grants. As the poor EPs do not have enough ready cash to buy the property in advance, they cannot claim MARV and stamp duty refund. RDM's progress report of September 1997 also shows that they could achieve 36.77% of their target in respect to MARV and stamp duty.

From the discussion above, it is evident that implementation process of compensation package involves several complicated tiers. It is a time and energy consuming process and payment is received in installments. People have strong reservations about the DC office's role. Respondents thought that the RU/RDM compensation procedure was fair. But in RU/RDM procedure as well, they faced difficulties in availing all types of entitlements. NGO involvement in the process did improve the quality of the project implementation.

Operationalization of Resettlement Policy

JMBA had acquired 417 acres of land in the late '80s in order to physically resettled those who would not be able to resettle on their own. EPs were notified to apply for places in resettlement sites. However, for quite sometime EPs did not show much interest in resettling at the site. In 1994 hundred families from Nalchia village claimed land in the East Bank Resettlement Site 1. Nalchia village is situated in the east guide bund area. A portion of that village was acquired by JMBA. Many evicted villagers relocated themselves in the rest of the village. 1994 flood washed out their homestead land and they ended up in the resettlement site. At present, 139 families have been allotted plot in the resettlement site 1. Site 1 is comprised of 25 acres of landed area. Till today site 1 is the only developed resettlement area.

It may be noted here that during the initial phase, resettlement sites were planned for relatively poorer people. However at the time of final allotment of plots this issue was not considered. Plots were available at different sizes (2.5 decimals, 5 decimals, and 7.5 decimals) and allotments were made to people from all socio-economic category. Some pointed out that such policy has created a situation where few relatively richer EPs have availed plots in the resettlement sites although they have other homesteads. Moreover it is also argued that at the resettlement site relatively richer EPs have established their control over common resources such as ponds.

The resettlement 2 is adjacent to site 1. This site has not yet been developed, but 152 families have already been residing at the site. Leaving aside other services, land filling has not been done at this site. During monsoon the area is usually gets flooded. The western resettlement site is not yet suitable for habitation. Basic infrastructures such as roads, market place, school, health care center have not yet been constructed. However once the three resettlement sites are completed they would be able to accommodate 755 EP families. Site 1 and 2 will be accommodating 529 EPs and site 3, 226 EPs (Milestone
Report, October, 1997). As not many people showed interest in resettlement sites, decision has been taken to deacquire (release) 177 acres of land. That people did not think of resettlement site as an option, does make a statement about the planning of the resettlement site.

During interviews the self-relocated EPs were asked why they did not apply for plots at the resettlement sites. People from Kalihati thana mostly pointed that their productive assets were located at Kalihati. For land record purpose, tax or any other official purpose they need to contact Kalihati thana. Moreover, if they reside at resettlement sites which is situated at Bhuapur they will lose their income sources which are all centred around Kalihati. Some EPs stated that the plots provided at resettlement sites were too small. Others pointed out they preferred to stay with their own kith and kins which was not possible at the site. Many families were squatting at various parts of the acquired land and as such did not have the urge to resettle themselves at the site which would entail buying land at the site. Most importantly there has been a huge time gap between eviction and providing access to resettlement site. One may argue that preparation of site is taking a long time. Meanwhile people have relocated themselves at other available places. Once they physically they relocate themselves they become disinterested to move again. However, it may have been a better deal for some of the EPs if they got the opportunity to get resettled at the site in the first instance. A management consultant to JMBP stated that instead of preparing few large resettlement sites clusters of resettlement villages would have been more viable. According to him it would have cost less. But it is the mental frame of multilateral donors and engineers which guide them to think big.

It may, therefore, be argued that proper planning has not been done in selecting resettlement sites. All three sites were located in low lying area, the sight of which psychologically discourage potential clients. Their distance from central working points of both Bhuapur and Tangail thana is also seen as a problem by the EPs. Time gap between eviction and preparation of resettlement site also worked against smooth implementation of the policy.

Implementation of Host Village Incentive Programme

It was seen earlier that among the 3604 households only a handful of them resettled in formal resettlement sites. The rest have resettled themselves in the surrounding villages. Since majority of the PAPs have relocated in the host villages it was important to provide various forms of assistance to those villages. The RU has undertaken some initiatives to this effect. So far it has helped sixteen educational institutions, seven mosques and distributed eighty tubewells, 800 sanitary latrine etc. It has also constructed 10km road in some of the host villages. The most important issue regarding implementation of such programme is how resettlement unit decides which of the proposed projects is most suitable for a particular community. It was argued by some that RU could not develop a proper needs assessment process. This could have been effectively done by organising group meetings in the host villages, encouraging the villagers to discuss and prioritise their needs, and generating information from those efforts and then prepare a master plan. A
good number of the self-resettled PAPs stated that they need inter-village road links, but such proposals are not taken into consideration by the authorities. In some cases such incentive programme at the end have served political purposes of the locally influential. One interviewee felt that at least 60% of the resources allocated to the host villages were decided on political considerations. One may therefore argue that if a master-plan was prepared through a participatory process, then maximum benefit for the displacees could have been ensured.

**Participation of NGO's**

Since the inception of the project, various NGOs have become active implementing partners of the JMBA. It has been stated earlier that the 1992 baseline survey of the east bank was conducted by BRAC. The same NGO was also responsible for the 1996 survey which determined the possible impact of JMBP on the people of surrounding river erosion and flood prone areas. In the compensation programme of this component BRAC is also working as an implementing partner with RU.

It is already clear, RDM, a local NGO from Sirajganj, is one of the most important actors in implementing the compensation package on both banks. RADOL, a local NGO from Tangail, got involved with the resettlement process to look after the nutritional aspect of the displaced people. It mainly provided homestead sapling to the evicted population. Later, the survey of the affected areas of the west bank, (not covered by BRAC study) was conducted by RADOL. Kishan, Udayan Shangha, Manob Kalyan Shangstha (MKS), three other local NGO’s are involved in plantation programme.

As a part of the resettlement and rehabilitation programme a hospital was constructed by RU at the east bank resettlement site. RU under an agreement leased out the hospital to Grameen Kalyan, a sister organization of Grameen Bank, for ninety-nine years. Grameen Kalyan has developed a health-care system for the PAPs. The hospital will maintain computerized health record of the PAPs. A contract has also been signed with Grameen Matsbya Foundation (GMF), another sister organization of the Grameen Bank, and SOBAS (Sonar Bangla Samaj Shansker Shangstha). Under the agreement Tk 1 crore interest free loan has been provided to these NGOs for fish cultivation. They have also been given 25 years lease of derelict water bodies for this purpose. As per the agreement the NGOs will get 60% of the profit and the PAPs will get the rest.

With the broad goal of ensuring the pre-eviction economic status of the PAPs intact, a Tk. 5 crore credit programme has been designed. Three thousand EPs have been identified for participating in training and credit programmes. PKSF has been contracted to supervise the credit programme. Two NGOs DORP and ASAUS have been selected to implement the credit programme.

In case of selection of NGOs it was found that RDM, RADOL, DORP, ASAUS, SOBAS, MKS, Udayan Shangha were selected through bidding. RDM, however, was selected through a limited tender, the rest through open tender. BRAC and Grameen Kalyan was
approached by RU to participate in the programme. GMF on the other hand approached RU with the fish cultivation proposal.

From the discussion above one can see that all these NGOs are participating in the project at the implementation level only. They did not demand participation in project planning and designing. NGO policy advocacy role in favour of the PAPs which has been seen in many countries has been absent in case of Jamuna bridge project. Some other NGOs are implementing their own programme among the PAPs. These NGOs never helped their clients during their eviction. On the contrary, Grameen Bank took back its outstanding credit from the clients who were being evicted. There are some procedural problems in JMBA’s NGO recruiting process. Many mainstream NGOs seriously object to participate in Government projects through bidding. In JMBP as well except the large two NGOs, BRAC and Grameen, were selected through bidding. This process has led to non-participation of NGOs with good track record. Some NGOs which have participated in the JMBP project through the existing system do not have experience of working with primary groups. Their registration with the local social welfare office states that they were not involved in any development work with foreign donation. Again such registrations were obtained prior to or after becoming associated with the JMBP. It is interesting to note that some of these NGO organizers are licensed contractors and some have strong political ties. They are chairpersons of local union council, ex-MP, office holders of political parties at the local level. With the exception of RDM serious questions have been raised about the competence of these NGOs to perform the assigned role.

A balanced mechanism for involving NGOs has to be developed, otherwise, NGO participation would not result in improving project quality. Under the current process, on the one hand new NGOs are being created, and on the other, big NGOs are getting access to new work domain without any competition at all. Both are detrimental for developing a healthy process of government-NGO collaboration.

CONCLUSION

Considering the general level of insensitivity of the policy planners of Bangladesh, One has to recognise that policy guide lines prepared for meaningful resettlement of the displaced people and reconstructing their livelihood, is quite extensive. Of course there are some obvious limitations. It would have been ideal if the policy was designed to provide land against land as compensation. It would have produced better result if policy of preparing a few larger resettlement sites was replaced by the concept of cluster resettlement villages. From the analysis of the process of operationalization of the policy guide line, it may be argued that some major gaps have developed between the policy and implementation process.
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