



DEVELOPMENT-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT AND POPULAR PROTESTS:A CASE STUDY OF ARANMULA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, KERALA

Dr. Nithya N.R.

Assistant Professor, PG Department of Political Science, Sree Kerala Varma College, Thrissur, Kerala, South India.

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to explore the ecological and human impacts of the proposed Aranamula international airport. The KGS Aranamula International Airport is an airport project planned to be built on about 700 acres of land at Aranamula in Pathanamthitta district at a cost of Rs. 2,000 crores. The controversial project faces strong protest and criticism from environmentalists and local people as well as the opposition parties in Kerala. The Kerala government had sanctioned an in principle approval for the airport during the Left Democratic Front regime in 2009, demanding that the promoters procure sufficient land on their own. However, the Central Government gave the green signal for the proposed airport in October 2012. Aranamula is basically an agricultural village and most of the people live on agricultural activities. The majority of the populations in the proposed site are Dalits, OBCs and other marginalized sections. The most significant loss, due to the proposed airport in Aranamula, will be the disappearance of a large extent of wetlands and paddy fields, water bodies and river basin of Pamba. Apart from this, there are concerns about dislocating about 3,000 families for the sake of projects. The project would destruct the total life structure of the marginalized groups and also violation of the provisions of the important laws. Hence, this paper will attempt to analyze some critical questions. Do we need three international airports within a distance of just 200 kilometers? Why the Government is favoring the project without the co-operation of the local people? What is the role of mafia in this venture? What is the impact of this project on the heritage culture of Aranamula? How social movements could change corporate policies over the life of the people?

Key Words: *Aranamula, Displacements, Agriculture, Marginalized Sections, Protests.*

Introduction

Development and environment are interconnected and having mutual impacts on each other. Improper or uncontrolled development is likely to cause adverse impacts on the environment, and environmental pollution or degradation may become a major obstacle for social and economic development. All development projects in one way or another cause damage to the environment and to the people. Whenever human beings try to improve their living standards they were destroying the natural habitats of thousands of living organisms including man himself. We have witnessed it not only in a single country, but also across the globe. This has affected not only the developing countries alone, but also the developed world as well. Most of the development projects were constructed in areas dominated by the marginalized tribal leading to displacement of people from their homeland. This paper provides an overview of the development induced displacement: how many people it affects, primary causes and key impacts. However, the main objective of the study is to analyze the problem of deforestation, loss of agricultural land, environmental degradation, and marginalization of the weaker sections in the proposed Aranamula airport project. The study also tries to examine the attitude of the political society towards environmental concerns.

Development-Induced Displacement: An Overview

Development is one of the primary causes of forced migration in the world today. Each year, millions of people around the globe are forcibly relocated and resettled away from their homes, lands and livelihoods in order to make way for large-scale development projects such as dams, reservoirs, power plants, roads, plantations, urban renewal, and oil, gas, and mining projects. The number of people forcibly displaced each year is also increasing. The primary causes of development-induced displacement over the past half century include: water supply (dams, reservoirs, irrigation); transportation (roads, highway, airports, canals); energy (mining, power plants, oil exploration and extraction, pipelines); large mono-crop plantations (oil palm, grains, sugarcane, and soya), parks and forest reserves; population redistribution schemes; and urban infrastructure. In aggregate terms, development-induced displacement often affects the economically, politically, and socially most vulnerable and marginalized groups in a population. Women, children, the elderly, and indigenous groups are particularly vulnerable to impoverishment and disempowerment when forcibly displaced. Some impoverishment risks posed by development-induced displacement are: landlessness; homelessness; joblessness; significant deterioration in incomes and livelihoods; food insecurity, undernourishment and hunger; serious declines in health, increases in morbidity, stress and psychological trauma; a spiral of downward mobility leading to economic marginalization often accompanied by social and cultural marginalization; and profound social disintegration. No precise data exists on the numbers of persons affected by development-induced displacement throughout the world. While development-induced displacement occurs throughout the



world, two countries in particular – China and India – are responsible for a large portion of such displacements (Hoshour and Kalafut, 2010).

India has one of the highest development-induced displacements in the world. There is however no reliable official statistics on the number of development related internally displaced in India. According to a report, in India alone, development projects have displaced more than 70 million people over the past 66 years. Although the tribal population only makes up eight percent of the total population, more than 50 percent of the development induced displaced are tribal peoples in India. Dam building is one of the most important causes for development related displacement (Mohapatra, 1999). According to a report, 'during the last fifty six years, some 3,900 big dams have been constructed in India. Many of them have led to large-scale forced eviction of vulnerable groups (they constitute 40-50 per cent in the case of the Sardar Sarovar Dam). The difficulties faced by internally displaced populations are numerous but distinct. Their right to participate and contest in the political processes is difficult. Such consequences lead to the requirement of legislations that address not only the issue of compensation, but also of resettlement, rehabilitation and participation in negotiation (Schade and Faist, 2010).

The Kerala Experience

Since the late 1970's a number of international scholars have held up the South Indian State of Kerala as a "Model of Development" (Ratcliffe 1978, Amin 1991, Frank and Chasin 1994). The basic characteristic of the Kerala Model is the high level of social development and physical social quality of life disproportionate to its level of economic development. According to Kunjaman (a noted economist), "systematic marginalization of the subaltern sections has been a blot on the Kerala model" (Kunhaman, 2002). In post-independent Kerala, large-scale alienation of tribal lands took place mainly due to the immigration of plainsmen to the hill areas, displacement for projects etc. In the past, exploitation of such poor regions was found both difficult and uneconomic. But, the recent rapid technological advancement and unrivalled economic and political strength of world capitalism, and the rising power of neo-colonialism through the G-8 directly and the IMF, WB, IBRD, etc., as agencies, have created favourable conditions for the evasion and extraction of natural resources from the ecologically fragile territories of tribal people. Thus, forced evictions of tribals to make way for mammoth capital-intensive development projects have become a distressing routine and ever-increasing phenomenon. For multinational companies looking for investment opportunities these areas are fast becoming favorite destinations (Hari, Nohan Mathur). Illegal acquisition of land by private sector companies like Suzlon (that erected 31 windmills in Palakkad district) is a classic example. Displacement for projects has resulted in greater landlessness for tribals. The study of Jose Murickan and others (2003) highlights some of the displacement figures among tribals in Kerala. The Idamalayar project displaced between 100 and 150 tribal families. Sixty seven percent of those displaced in the Pooyamkutty hydroelectric project were tribals. The Neriamangalam hydel project displaced 150 tribal families. The Periyar Tiger Reserve displaced fourteen tribal families. The rehabilitation package for these families was also denied because they had no documents for land in their possession. Despite epochal laws and Supreme Court orders, restoration of tribal land remains a mirage (Nithya, 2014).

Profile of Aranmula

Aranmula is a temple village in the state of Kerala, India. At a distance of about 128 km from Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, it is situated on the banks of the river Pampa. Traditions, culture, traditional village life, sceneries are unique for Aranmula. Aranmula represents the apex heritage of Kerala. Aranmula Boat Race is one of the oldest boat races of Kerala. The Aranmula Boat Race or vallamkali, a traditional water sport conducted in special wooden boats called chundanvallams or snake boats. This is associated with a Hindu religious tradition of the Aranmula Parthasarathi temple which is the other thing that makes this place famous. The boat race takes place in the Pamba river during the days of Onam when the river has enough water. Now-a-days, due to a few hydro electric projects and dams, the river does not have much water during the season and the state government releases water for a few days to help the traditional boat race to be conducted without much difficulty. The Valla sadya is a unique mass feast with strong devotional moorings, given to the crew of Palliyodams which the devotees consider a divine vessel of Lord Krishna, presiding deity of Aranmula Sree ParthaSarathy Temple. An Interesting point is that UNESCO recognized Aranmula, a 'global heritage village'. Aranmula a temple town and a flourishing river port from times immemorial was also a trade post. One is the Aranmula Metal Mirror called Aranmula kannadi, a unique craft which is not found anywhere else in the world. It is a polished metallic mirror made traditionally by some traditional artisan families of this place in some special alloy mix. The unique heritage village of Aranmula gets its name from the centuries-old Aranmula Parthasarathy Temple. Aranmula Kottaram or Aranmula Palace is an old palace at Aranmula, a historical and traditional village in Kerala, India. The palace at Aranmula (Aranmula Kottaram or Aranmula Vadekke Kottaram) built mostly in wood is an architectural marvel and has a history of around 200 years. It was here that the 'Thiru Abharanam', ornaments of Lord Ayyappa at Sabarimala, were originally kept and it still is a stopover of the annual procession from Pandalam. Aranmula is known for the Vaasthu Vidya Gurukulam, the traditional way of



constructing buildings. Aranmula Grama Panchayat (under Kulanada Block) is the local governing body of Aranmula. The office is in between Kottakkakom and Kalarikkodu. It consists of 18 wards with a population of 28679.

Proposed Aranmula Airport Project: Key Milestones

At present, Kerala is facing a big debate over the new international air port project. The KGS Aranmula International Airport is an airport project planned to be built on about 700 acres of land at Aranmula in Pathanamthitta district at a cost of Rs. 2,000 crores. It is the "First Private International Greenfield" Airport project in India. The airport project is jointly promoted by the Chennai-based KGS Group, a real estate development company, and Reliance Anil Dhirubai Ambani with 15 per cent equity each and the Kerala government holding 10 per cent equity.

The Kerala government had sanctioned an in principle approval for the airport during the Left Democratic Front regime in 2009, demanding that the promoters procure sufficient land on their own. However, the Central Government gave the green signal for the proposed airport in October 2012 and the project was estimated to be completed within 18 months. The project has been controversial from the beginning when around 350 acres of fertile land was bought by an educational trust, Mount Zion Educational Trust, under the pretence of building an aircraft institute and fish farming. However, the locals later found out that they were fleeced and it was to build a full-fledged greenfield international airport. The Kerala State Legislative Committee had even unanimously opposed the airport project. The controversial project faces strong protest from environmentalists and local people as well as the opposition parties in Kerala. The State Government, however, is of the view that the Airport is necessary and has declared that it would go ahead with the project, notwithstanding the Parliamentary Standing Committee's opposition to it. As per the written information from the District Collector of Pathanamthitta through RTI Act, the company KGS is in possession of only 31.7 acres of wetland in Aranmula, Mallappuzhassery and Kidangannur villages. They have obtained various clearances claiming 350 acres of land with them. All the various clearances and approvals that KGS Group has obtained is by bogus reports and forged documents. Kottayam Vigilance court has ordered for a Vigilance enquiry on the land scam which involves the land mafia, KGS Group and Government officials who helped KGS for illegal land transactions and Pathanamthitta Munciff court has ordered KGS not to enter encroach in the land till further orders from the court. Recently, the Southern Bench of the National Green Tribunal ordered that work on the airport cannot begin till they issue further orders. The Bench held that there was substantial question of law relating to concerns with environment and ecology involved in the project (The Indian Express, July 7, 2013).

On April 2013, The National Green Tribunal granted an interim stay on the project banning any construction at the site. It also stayed the Kerala Government's order to convert the 500 acres of land for industrial purpose until further orders. The Tribunal had pronounced the stay in response to a petition that stated that the construction of the airport was in violation of the provisions of the Kerala Conservation of Paddy and Wet Land Act, 2008, the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963 the Environment Protection Act, 1986 and the Land Acquisition Act. The Tribunal set aside its order on 30 April 2013, dismissing the petition filed by the Aranmula Heritage Village Protection Action Council challenging various decisions related to the project including industrial area notification for the project and the no-objection certificate given by the Kerala Government. The airport project was given environmental clearance by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, New Delhi on 19 November 2013. The Ministry of Civil Aviation of the Government of India has issued a letter dated May 25, 2015 withdrawing the 'in-principle' approval to the proposed Aranmula Airport Project. On November 2013, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has provided full environmental approval for the construction of the airport.

On December 2013, India's National Green Tribunal ordered a stay of work on the proposed Aranmula International Airport development, after a petition from a local environmental activist lodged an objection to the environmental clearance process for the airport. A separate petition is before the tribunal, also seeking a halt to the project, on ecological grounds. KGS Aranmula International Airport, the company leading the development, also faces objections to the airport construction from the Aranmula Parthasarathi Temple, which is objecting to having its masts shortened, to eliminate obstructions to proposed flight paths. The KGS Group announced it will challenge a decision by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to revoke environmental clearances issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests for the development of Aranmula International Airport. The ruling was made in late May-2014. KGS Aranmula International Airport Ltd said the airport development company has decided to go ahead with the project after rectifying the procedural lapses pointed out by the NGT and was confident that the airport can re-secure environmental clearance, as the NGT retracted the previous clearance on procedural grounds. If the environmental clearances are rectified KGS group expects that the airport will be commissioned by the end of 2016, matching its original schedule (The Hindu, June, 2014). Hence, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change granted conditional approval to conduct a new environmental impact assessment for the Aranmula International Airport project. The project also requires approval from the Ministry of Defence (The Hindu, July, 2015).



Interestingly, the proposed international airport at Aranmula has been included in the Economic Survey of 2014-15 presented by the Union government before Parliament. The survey had acknowledged the Aranmula airport as one of the 15 green field airports to come up in the country as part of the 'major initiatives to augment better airport infrastructure across the country. The Aranmula heritage action council has demanded the Centre to remove the proposed Aranmula airport from the economic survey that was released last week. According to Kummanam Rajasekharan "We do not have an anti-development agenda and are not against the construction of an airport, but we will not allow an airport to come up at Aranmula by reclaiming wetlands, rivers, ponds, sacred groves and temples". (The Hindu, March 4, 2015). The Defense Ministry had withdrawn the no-objection certificate (NOC) for the airport project on May 8, 2015 in the backdrop of the National Green Tribunal cancelling the Environment Clearance granted for the project earlier. Meanwhile, the KGS Company has reportedly started a fresh EIA in the wetlands of Aranmula and Aranmula Pancha. Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Prakash Javadekar made a statement in Kochi the other day that his Ministry had not framed any ToR for conducting a fresh EIA in Aranmula as the green tribunal as well as the Supreme Court had rejected the controversial airport project. Recently, the website of the Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, has placed the Rs.2, 000-crore KGS Aranmula International Airport Project as 148th item on the list of 650 projects accepted by the Union government's Project Management System (The Hindu, July 11, 2015). Suddenly the KGS group says that the "airport project has received all approvals, including Steering Committee convened by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs, and Kerala government which has declared the project area as Industrial Land." While inaugurating the Boat race, Union Minister, Mahesh Sharma declared that "the village airport were under the consideration of the Centre, but due to the unique features of the Aranmula village, the project was not included in the list and the centre would take steps to declare Aranmula as a heritage Village."(The Hindu, August 31, 2015).

Various environmental groups were against the move to make the banks of Pamba an industrial zone. Most fascinating matter is that this place is hardly 100 kilometers away from the Kochi International Airport and another 100 kilometers towards south there is Thiruvananthapuram International Airport. Here comes a question that do we need three international airports within a distance of just 200 kilometers?. This is one of the more pertinent questions that policy makers need to answer. Kerala already has two international airports, at Trivandrum and Cochin. As per government guidelines for obtaining clearance, an airport should not be closer to 150 km from another airport. According to Salim Ali Foundation report, the proposed Aranmula airport is 122 km from Trivandrum and closer to Cochin (104 km). Moreover, competition is bound to drive down prices and make all three airports economically unviable. The aviation industry in India is already going through difficult times.

Do we need an International Airport at Aranmula Protagonist's View Points

The protagonists of this project point out the following benefits to the people and society. The project is expected to generate 1,500 direct and 6,000 indirect jobs. The terminal building is being designed to handle 1,000 passengers at a time. The company also plans to have a Special Economic Zone, a multi-specialty hospital, a shopping mall (either Lulu or Phoenix Market City), a luxury hotel and an international school within the airport complex. The proposed Airport would provide transport infrastructure to pilgrims who wish to travel by air to *Sabarimala*, the second largest pilgrim centre in India with annual pilgrims of around 60 millions. Airport location is close to multiple tourism destinations such as Kumarakom, the backwaters of Alappuzha and high ranges of Kumily and Thekkady tiger reserve. The airport is expected to serve Central Travancore region, comprising parts of five districts in Kerala state namely Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Idukki and Kollam. Out of the foreign and domestic tourists' arrival to Kerala, these five districts together account for about 21 per cent of foreign tourists and 14 per cent of domestic tourists. Therefore, an airport in Aranmula would serve the travel requirements of non-resident Keralites, foreign and domestic tourism. It will be a great facilitator for the Maramon Convention, one of the biggest conventions of Christians accounting for about 1, 00, 000 pilgrims.

Perception of Environmentalists and Policy Makers

The people of Aranmula formed an organization called *Aranmula Heritage Village Protection Council* and adopted all peaceful methods to register their protest. The ongoing campaign against the airport has received the support of vast sections of the local community, cutting across religious and political barriers. The proposed project is vehemently opposed by the Opposition Left Democratic Front (LDF) and a prominent section of the state's Congress leaders, the BJP as well. Various local social and environmental organizations are leading an agitation against the Airport project stating that it would destroy many of the characteristics that qualify Aranmula as a heritage village by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage. Kummanam Rajasekharan, who heads the Aranmula Heritage Village Protection Committee, contend that the airport that KGS Group intends to construct an airport city or Aerotropolis that requires more than 3,000 acres of land and



that such a large project would cause irreparable and devastating damage to the environment and ecosystem at Aranmula. Using satellite imagery of the site, the Aranmula Heritage Village Action Council emphasized that approximately 3,000 families will have to be evicted. He strongly demanded an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation and other Central agencies into the corruption and violation of laws in connection with the private airport project at Aranmula. A large scale corruption including unaccounted money and power plays is doubted at site. Moreover, that the construction of the airport was in violation of the provisions of the Kerala Conservation of Paddy and Wet Land Act, 2008, the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963 the Environment Protection Act, 1986 and the Land Acquisition Act. He pointed out that two international airports in the State are located within 100 km of the proposed airport. What the people want are basic infrastructural facilities like road, incentives to farmers, better bus stops and rickshaws. Kummanam Rajasekharan, has raised concerns about kodimaram (temple mast) of the ancient Aranmula Parthasarathy temple situated 905 metres away from the runway. The Aranmula Parthasarathi Temple, which is considered as one of the 108 Tirupatis (most important temples for Vaishnavites) is located in this village. All these have helped only the land mafia and lobbys. Ever since the proposed airport was declared, the land cost in the area has gone up several folds. Kummanam Rajasekharan urged that the Chief Minister misused his position and deliberately concealed real facts to favour KGS Group in Aranmula airport project (Kummanam, 2013). On the other hand Nanda Kumar P T, executive director, the KGS group argued that it would not affect the Aranmula Parthasarathy Temple or any other structures and does not involve displacement of families.

Aranmula is basically an agricultural village and most of the people live on agricultural activities. The *puncha* paddy fields and wetlands in Aranmula will be adversely affected if it implemented. There are several water bodies and paddy fields which act as catchment areas for ground water. If these paddy fields are filled up to build runway, the water will directly flow into the sea and the area will certainly face ground water shortage in the near future. Apart from this environmental concern, there were concerns about dislocating about 500 families (official statistics) for the sake of projects. As the proposed airport area and the contiguous paddy lands and wetlands are the flood plains of river Pumba, they serve as natural flood control in the area whenever the river Pumba overflows, reducing the impacts of flood on the local population and their lives considerably. The most significant loss, due to the proposed airport in Aranmula, will be the disappearance of a large extent of wetlands and paddy fields, that too in a State that produces hardly 11 per cent of the total requirement of rice. Sugathakumari, noted poet and human rights activist, appealed the villagers to strive for reviving paddy cultivation in Aranmula Puncha and thereby restoring the rich agrarian tradition of the heritage village. She pointed out that government should take steps to revive paddy cultivation in Aranmula Puncha, instead of "supporting all sorts of anti-nature and anti-farming activities in the name of a private airport project which was out-rightly rejected by the local people. The agitation is against the "evil forces with money power and political might." She considers this project as "anti-people and anti-nature" and the ongoing agitation to save Aranmula was a struggle to protect the remaining paddy land and wetland in the State. She called upon the Centre to cancel whatever clearances it had given for setting up a private Greenfield airport. The second phase of the mass protest against the Aranmula airport planned from February 2, 2014 "till the private airport company was packed off from the soil of Aranmula" (Sugathakumari, 2013).

There are concerns over the economic feasibility of the proposed airport and has come in for sharp scrutiny as it falls within 100 km of the two well functioning international airports at Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram. Therefore, there is the possibility of the new airport not generating enough business to sustain itself. An interesting case in this regard is that, it was the leftist government that gave the green signal to the project earlier. Now while the central government ruled by the Congress led coalition (UPA) gives the go ahead clearance duly supported by the UDF, another strong group of peoples' representatives from the Congress party oppose it together with those of the left parties. Chief Minister, Omman Chandy stated that the government was committed to providing continuity to the projects mooted by the previous government and the airport in Pathanamthitta district should come as part of improving infrastructure facilities in the State. The CPM Politburo member MA Baby MLA who was a minister in the previous LDF ministry admitted in the Assembly that the LDF had made a serious mistake in sanctioning Aranmula airport project. The local people are against the Airport. They want basic facilities. Then why the Government is favoring the project without the co operation of the local people?. According to V M Sudheeran (KPCC President of Kerala), vested interests were protected in Aranmula airport issue. However, the state government did not pay much attention to protests and cries of the common people and planned to go ahead with the project. Recently, the Southern Bench of the National Green Tribunal ordered that work on the airport cannot begin till they issue further orders. The Bench held that there was substantial question of law relating to concerns with environment and ecology involved in the project. Altogether, this case study reveals yet another paradox in the trajectory of development in post-globalized Kerala. The recent decision of Supreme Court and National Green Tribunal is a victory of the concerted and continuous efforts of the people as a number of organizations had come together to fight against the project that would have caused significant environmental and ecological damage.



To V M Sudheeran, "The Green Tribunal's verdict on Aranmula project is a strong warning against those who flout rules and disregard the environment and ecology in order to achieve something they desperately need".

Study Reports: The Impact

The Salim Ali foundation had conducted a study (2014) on the proposed Aranmula Airport. The major findings of the reports are as follows

1. The proposed airport would destroy 400 acres of wetlands and paddy fields and paddy farming, in a state that produces hardly 11% of the total requirement of rice.
2. The deteriorating ecological condition of Kozhithodu adversely affected the water flow as well as soil quality. The same is likely to happen to the Aranmula area if the airport is built. This will affect groundwater as well, which is source for water for several regions in and around Aranmula
3. Over 212 species of plants in the region (of which 22 were endemic to the Western Ghats 110 important for their medicinal properties and 88 wetland species) and 60 species of fishes is likely to be affected, with some of them endangered;
4. The famous Aranmula temple, about 1,500 years old, is just within 200 meters of the proposed airport site, and is deemed an endogenous tourism area according to United Nations Development Project (UNDP);
5. It is estimated that 3,000 members of families would need to be evacuated; how these people would be compensated is not clear;

The Advocate Commissioners filed a report in the High Court of Kerala. According the Advocate Commission's report (2014), the proposed airport in Aranmula will become a threat to the holiness of the famous Parthasarathy temple. It will also become a threat to the coming generations. It will also be resulted in high noise pollution and the damage of environment, affects valuable plant species, fishes and micro organism in the area.

The Legislative Assembly Committee on Environmental Affairs found the Airport Project "highly detrimental to the environment". The Kerala State Biodiversity Board submitted a report to the government in March 2013, expressing its reservations over "the land use changes and ecological imbalance that the project will entail" The Board observed that 80% of the 500 acres earmarked for the project were paddy fields. Conversion of a portion of the 3,500-acre paddy field would impact on the remaining wetlands, disturb the food chain, and accelerate the depletion of fish resources as well as other flora and fauna in the Pamba river basin.

Conclusion

The paper is an attempt of a brief appraisal based on available literatures of the impact of the proposed Aranmula Airport development project on the displaced populations and the ecology Aranmula. It cannot be denied that development induced displacement has been an ancient phenomenon. Development projects are mostly targeted towards river systems, mines, forests etc. Moreover, the segment of population which is widely affected is the marginalized population which is already a deprived segment in the Indian society. The consequences of displacement are wide and varied. In India, development projects will continue in the years to come. There is hardly any nation-wide framework on the issue of internal displacement. The government's response to IDP due to development projects is largely vague, and the displaced are therefore often left unnoticed. A development model based upon excessive and brutal displacement is profoundly unsustainable, and is resisted by the people and communities it threatens and affects. However, the converse can also be true: often projects that are better for people are also better for the planet. This becomes clear if we honor existing resources and assets that have been undervalued in prevailing development models, including cultivation and grazing lands, forests, ecosystem services, waterways, community, and traditional knowledge on how to cultivate the earth's resources in a sustainable manner. We need to work toward a world in which human connection to land, vibrant communities, healthy ecosystems, and democratic decision-making are not bulldozed as 'obstacles' to development, but rather are defended as the foundation for human health, justice, and sustainability. I conclude with a quotation from Mahatma Gandhi, "When a new project is envisaged, ask the common man whether it would benefit him, if he says 'NO', throw it away".

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