

GENDER IMPACT RESEARCH KOLKATA ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT INDIA

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Case summary of the ADB funded Kolkata Environmental Improvement Program in India (2002-2013).

Outcomes of a gender impact research, consisting out of interviews with 102 women and 12 men as well focused group discussions.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Kolkata is confronted with an influx of migrants. Millions of people live in the slums and along the canals in the outer area of the city in deplorable conditions without the basic facilities of clean drinking water and sanitation. Canal bank dwellers are mostly migrants, only left with the option to settle along the filthy canals.

The Municipal Kolkata Environmental Improvement Program was initiated with assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to improve the sewerage system, and improve the canals which provided drainage for the city's sewage outfalls, as well to reduce poverty in the slums. There were some governance (facilitate community empowerment through participatory processes) and privatization components (to help develop Kolkata Municipal Corporation as a proficient and autonomous municipality) included in the program as well.

A \$ 250 million loan was provided in 2002. Another \$113.6 million was sanctioned on 14 December 2006. Total cost estimate of the project was \$ 401.4 million.

The program after completion (in 2015) claims to have improved the lives of one and a half million people.

Canal improvement would require displacement of 11.500 dwellers who had been living at the banks of the canals for several years.

The canal bank dwellers never ever have been recognized as authorized inhabitants of the city. It very probably was only because of ADB involvement that a resettlement and re-housing of the canal bank dwellers had being considered by the Kolkata Municipality Corporation.

GENDER POLICY

Since that there has been ADB involvement social and environmental policies, including gender policies, would have had to apply to the program.

The ADB has a gender policy in place. It adopts 'mainstreaming' as a key strategy in promoting 'gender equity'. Gender concerns would have to be addressed from the beginning to the end of the project. The gender policy has the status of a recommendation and is not binding on the country which ADB is funding.

The Bank also has a policy in place for involuntary resettlements. The Bank avoids involuntary resettlement where possible or minimize it. Affected people need to be compensated in order to make for the loss of their livelihood and income. Involuntarily resettlement policy is part of the Safeguards of the Bank. Different from the gender policy, these safeguards policies are mandatory. The Bank was obliged in the Kolkata program to meet this requirement.

Affected people should be well informed about the project if they are to be resettled and be consulted about the resettlement itself. Resettlement benefits should be provided even to those who are not legally entitled to the land. Host communities should also benefit by the project so that they do not grow averse to the resettled people.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

CONSULTATION

From the very beginning there was no transparency in the program.

To determine the number of families to be resettled officials visited the canal bank dwellers communities but only registered one male member of each household. On basis of this number flats (apartments) were distributed among households, independent from the family size.

Families were very faintly told that they might have to shift but the people were never given any notice in writing. People were never involved in the planning of the project which is a provision for involuntary resettlement. Instead, the canal bank dwellers were informed by the officials that they were illegal occupants and they have no right to stay on the canal banks. They were informed very late about the exact location of the resettlement sites. The affected people were not even shown the flats, to which they were going to be deported, beforehand. The Project Completion Report declares that stakeholder consultations were held, and that separate discussions were held with women to gain information on such gender issues such as appropriate entitlements. But women insisted that they were never allowed to speak in these meetings and even if they were allowed to speak, their concerns were never answered.

HOUSING

The flats were badly constructed, and showed deficiencies from the beginning, like cracks in the wall, leaking toilets and overflowing septic tanks, there were no separate rooms for kitchens. Basic facilities like water taps were lacking. Common facilities like water pumps were badly maintained and ill repaired. Electricity is expensive for the inhabitants. The flats offered no space for any small grocery store, workplace, or animal shelter. So the economic activities that people before had developed at their previous home, could not be continued.

The small size of the flat posed several difficulties for the women. Most of the families consisted of more than 5 family members. Old women had to let their sons go and stay in separate houses as it was not possible for them to stay together in the small flat. This led to more economic pressure on the family as now they had to rent a place. Many old wailing mothers were left alone as their sons had to stay away for lack of space. Many women complained that they could not marry their sons due to lack of space and privacy. Another stark phenomenon which was noticed was that the girls were married off earlier as there was little space for them to stay.

Women faced the most difficulties as they had to adjust the most. Many old women had to stay out of their homes after evenings in order to let the children of the house study peacefully. Some women had to sleep under the beds so that their sons could sleep peacefully on the beds with their wives. As there is no separate kitchen so women had to use the small space near the toilet as kitchen. The women had to manage in such a small space and some even cooked inside the room.

INCOME

The completion document claims that resettlement has been provided to all within 2.5 kms. In reality the resettlement sites were at a far bigger distance from the canal banks where the dwellers lived earlier and this affected their income and livelihood of the affected people immensely. Repeated protests against this were denied.

Almost all the women worked as domestic laborers. They had been living on the canal banks for years and were working in homes nearby. When they had to be resettled in a completely new area, they were at a loss. Many women did not get jobs for years as they did not know anyone in the new locality. Some women chose to travel to their earlier place of work. The timings of their jobs was such that many of them had to travel back and from home as they were even homemakers needing to be back in order to take care of children and elderly. Almost everywhere women complained that they had to reduce the number of homes where they worked for lack of time as they had to travel long distance.

This sudden loss of income for some and reduction of income for many has led to loss of decision making of women in the households as women were not able to contribute equally to the expenses of the family.

The existing patriarchal structure already subjugated women in their homes. But earlier they were at least respected and they had a say as they contributed equally in the expenses of the family but now this was even lost.

CONCLUSION

The project documents relentlessly asserted that it tried to mainstream gender in order to check disparity. This was however challenged by the women who were affected due to displacement. The concerns of the women were never heard from the very start of this project.

Overall the resettlement led to circumstances that really are burdensome for both men and women but are even more so for the women as they even had to do household chores, take care of the children and elderly apart from their work.

The project report claims success of the project and reports that all the objectives it strived to achieve was successful. there is not much difference in the areas the project claimed to have improved during the rains. The canals which were to be improved and because of which so many people had to be resettled continue to remain in the same situation as they were 10 years back. Only some parts of the canals have been repaired. Currently, the canal banks have again become homes to several people. People have again started settling on the canal banks.

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CASE BACKGROUND

In the last few decades, India has witnessed drastic change due to the liberalization of the economy. After the floodgates of the market were opened in the early 90s the change in the economy paved way for social and cultural change too. One can also observe significant changes in the pattern of urban growth in India. The urban population has been growing profusely. There are many factors pertaining to this development. The huge number of migrants every major Indian city is inviting is rising sharply every year. There are many reasons behind migration; one of them being the crisis of agriculture in rural India. Among the major cities which have seen the rise in population, Kolkata is one of them. Kolkata because of its geographical location has always been a host for millions of migrants from the nearby states.

In the last few years, Kolkata has also seen uneven development just like many other cities in India. There is a huge disparity between the living conditions of the urban poor and the rich. Millions of people live in the slums in deplorable conditions without the basic facilities of clean drinking water and sanitation. The Government never took any step to provide the basic living conditions to these poor people and with time their condition worsened.

In the year 19989, the Government of India sought assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in order to change the conditions of environmental degradation which has been happening over many years in the major cities. Both Government of India (GOI) and the ADB agreed to set up the Municipal Kolkata Environmental Improvement Programme (MKEIP). The ADB had appointed foreign consultants to assist the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) for setting up the MKEIP and studying the feasibility of the project. The study led to the setting of the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Programme (KEIP). The project was prepared under the technical assistance of the ADB. In the beginning, the project was estimated at \$360 million including \$250 million from the ADB loan. On 19, December 2000, ADB approved a loan of \$250 million for the project. It was decided that the Government of West Bengal (GoWB) would contribute \$54.6 million and the KMC would contribute \$55.4 million towards the project. The loan agreement (loan 1813- IND) was signed on 18 September 2001 and the loan became effective from 16 April 2002. The loan agreement was amended on 24 July 2002. The Department for International Development of the United Kingdom (DFID) agreed to support the capacity-building program which was one of the components of the project with a grant of \$42 million. Therefore the GoI requested the ADB to cancel \$30 million so that the debt of the GoWB is reduced. ADB's share in the project was in the form of 30% grant and a 70% loan.

In October 2005, the GoWB requested the ADB for a supplementary loan to help the KMC achieve and fulfill the original objectives of the project. The Project completion report claims

that the additional loan of \$113.6 million was sanctioned on 14 December 2006. Thus the revised estimate of the project was \$401.4 million.

The objectives of the project were to improve the environment in the outer areas (boroughs) of Kolkata, reduce poverty in the low income-areas by providing affordable access to basic urban services, facilitate community empowerment through participatory processes, protect the environment from adverse developmental impacts, and help develop KMC as a proficient and autonomous municipality. The project, therefore, had six components: stakeholder consultation process, sewerage and drainage improvements, solid waste management, slum improvements, canal improvements, and implementation assistance and capacity building.

The project claimed to have improved the lives of more than 1.5 million people through all its components. It was also expected to benefit 65000 slum dwellers by providing them with better infrastructure for their living. Another major claim which the project made was to rehabilitate 11000 canal bank dwellers who were to be displaced. Canal improvement which was just one component of the project required displacement of a huge number of people who had been living on the banks of the canals for several years. Improving the canal meant that the canals needed to be de-silted. Originally it was accounted that 3626 families would be affected. In 2013 some changes were made and the target for resettlement was reduced to 2880 affected households.

The canal bank dwellers were mostly migrants from different districts of Bengal and nearby states. The Resettlement Plan was prepared in 2000. But it was changed in the following years due to these reasons;

- Increase in the length of canal improvements
- Cancellation of sewage treatment plant components and drainage pumping stations
- A change in location for the solid waste management facility

Canal improvement required desilting and dredging of about 77.31 km of canals which provided drainage for the city's sewage outfalls. The study showed that over the years the carrying capacity of these canals had been reduced overwhelmingly. Thus this rationale was provided for the displacement of the canal bank dwellers as they were somehow considered responsible for the degrading conditions of the canals.

The canal Improvement component of the project comprised of three sub-components.

- Canal rehabilitation in parts of T-P basin, Keorapukur basin, Churial basin and Monikhali basin.
- Construction of 52 bridges over the rehabilitated canals

- Construction of 3 pumping stations at Chowbhaga, Keorapukur, and Manikhali to handle additional storm water flow.

Though the project reckoned women to be benefitting at par with men, it is the canal improvement component which was considered to benefit women specifically because of the resettlement program. Although the project completion report states that the project was not targeted specifically at women but all its components somehow or the other helped in improving the lives of the women. The project report further makes two claims which show that gender concerns were addressed; one through the resettlement program and the other by appointing self-help groups with the help of KEIP in order to empower women economically. In Gender Mainstreaming Case Studies: India, it is proclaimed that the gender mainstreaming account focuses only on the resettlement plan and its implementation which was required for the component Canal Improvements of the project. Therefore we have taken up this component as our key area and we would be assessing the gender disparities, if any, present in this component of the project.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical analysis of the methods appropriates to a field of study. It helps to define the information to be analyzed, it provides the conceptual tools and procedures necessary to perform an analysis and it sets forth the limits of the analysis.

Considering the nature of the present study, the quantitative method has been used to collect data from the field. Two research techniques have been used, that is, interviews and focused group discussion. Interviews of 102 women and 12 men have been conducted. An intensive and thought provocative focused group discussion was also done. One focus group discussion was conducted only among women and another one was mixed-including men and women both. Various reflexive feedbacks emerged out of group discussion and it also brought before us some very significant questions.

It is very complicated to trace objectively the complex intersectionality of the subjective experience of consequences of the whole process which affects the livelihood of these affected persons. Therefore the study was focused on the interview particularly. Total numbers of 102 in-depth interviews have been done with the affected women. Most of the interviews were taken at the new resettlement sites of the affected persons. The nature of the interview was not strictly structured as most of the respondents gave their narrations.

Focused group discussion was intended to understand the perception of these affected persons on the idea of development that how they view the impact of these political-economic processes of development.

Considering the limitation of time and availability of the affected people due to their nature of work, I selected my respondents through random sampling. As the field of the study was informal unorganized sector, therefore, the technique of data collection dependent on quantitative method.

POLICY INFRASTRUCTURE

The project required to displace a large number of women. It is quite natural that in any kind of displacement it is the women and children who are affected the most. As this project was aided by the ADB so it was necessary for the project to follow the gender policy of ADB. ADB has some pointers in order to promote gender equity in development. ADB had adopted a policy on the role of Women in Development in the year 1985. This policy was to emphasize women as a special target group along with its other different operational programs. But this approach of the ADB evolved in the next few years and the bank adopted an approach where gender was seen as a cross-cutting issue influencing all social and economic processes. “ADB’s Policy on Gender and Development will adopt mainstreaming as a key strategy in promoting gender equity. Gender considerations will be mainstreamed into all ADB activities, including macroeconomic and sector work and lending and technical assistance (TA) operations. The key elements of ADB’s policy will include gender sensitivity, gender analysis, gender planning, mainstreaming, and agenda setting.” The new gender policy of the ADB tries to bring in gender considerations into all the projects of the bank thereby promoting gender equity. As it clearly mentions that the Gender and Development (GAD) policy would be promoted even in Technical Assistance and loan operations, therefore this project automatically comes under the scope of this project. The GAD declares that the gender considerations will be equally important along with its economic and social work. ADB is required to promote the mainstreaming of gender considerations in projects and the gender concerns have to be addressed in all the stages of the project, right from the identification of the project to the post evaluation of the project. ADB not only tries to mainstream gender considerations in its projects but also resolves to encourage projects which specifically targets women thereby addressing the gender disparities. The ADB aims to address the issues of women’s health, education by devising specific strategies in its projects. It even resolves to give special attention to women education by providing scholarships for girls. All the ADB projects require an Initial Social Assessment (ISA) before the

project. Gender concerns have to be addressed as part of the ISA and this is deemed necessary for all the projects. It is written in the Gender Policy of ADB that a proper social analysis is required if any gender quotient is found at the time of feasibility study. According to the policy, women would be included in the project from the very start. GAD objectives and components would be monitored throughout the project implementation program. Even the project completion report requires providing details of the gender specific project objectives and the impact it had on the lives of the affected women. The policies proposed by the ADB tries to bridge the gender gap in the projects but what is important is that these are just recommendations and not binding on the country which ADB is funding.

As this project required displacement of a huge number of people, therefore ADB's policy on involuntary resettlement is also very significant. The bank makes it very clear in its document that it would avoid involuntary resettlement wherever it is possible or at the least minimize resettlement where a huge number of people are supposed to be affected. Another important element of this policy is compensation provided to the affected persons. The document very comprehensible enunciates that the affected people are needed to be compensated with all kinds of assistance required of them to at least live in conditions as they would have if the project would not have happened. This is indicative of the fact that the bank at least in its papers gives immense importance to the livelihood of the affected people and they recommend ways to address this factor which is very much connected to the question of displacement. The document states three most important elements of involuntary resettlement, firstly it requires that compensation is provided in order to make for the loss of livelihood and income. It not only calls for this but also demands compensation to people for losing their assets during the process of resettlement. Secondly, it is needed that assistance is provided during relocation and it is also important that the relocation site has all the basic amenities which are required for a decent living. It is the responsibility of the implementing authority to provide all kinds of facilities and services at the site of relocation. Thirdly, it is stated that the people who are affected should be assisted in all ways possible to make a living which they would have done if the project was not implemented. Another very significant point which is put down in the document is that the affected people should be well informed about the project if they are to be resettled. It also demands of them to be consulted during the project and then only go forward with the project if the affected persons are satisfied with it. It is required that the vulnerable sections of the affected people are given enough assurance through a social preparation with them. It is even stated that the social and cultural institutions of the affected people and also the ones who are hosting them should be encouraged and supported. The host communities should also be economically benefitted by the project so that they do not grow averse to the

resettled people. There should be an initiative to integrate both the host community and resettled community economically and socially. The resettlement benefits should be provided even to those who are not legally entitled to the land which is being taken for purposes. They should also be acknowledged as rightful recipients of compensation. Thus the overall provisions for involuntary resettlement are well articulated in the document of ADB. Unlike the gender policy, this policy of the ADB is obligatory on the part of the agency or country which implements the project.

Therefore it is important that these provisions, both for gender disparity and involuntary resettlement are kept in mind while assessing the project outputs. These recommendations and obligations become the parameter for assessing the project.

CONDITION OF THE FAMILIES BEFORE RESETTLEMENT

Initially, the study of the project demanded that 3626 families are displaced in order to smoothen the work of improving the conditions of the canals but later on the number was reduced to 2880 families. The families have been living along the Keorapukur, New Manikhali, Jinjira, Churial Extension, Brij, Ajaynagar, Guniagachi and other such canals towards the fringes of Kolkata like Joka (Thakurpukur), Smapa Mirzanagar, Kudghat, Rajdanga, Santoshpur (Jadavpur), Kalikapur and other such places for decades and they were socially, culturally and economically tied to it. The canal dwellers were always deemed as illegal encroachers and they were never recognized as authorized dwellers. The canal bank dwellers have voter ID cards, ration cards and even BPL(Below Poverty Level) cards which make them legal citizens of this country. The political parties have always turned to them in order to ask for votes but have never recognized them as authorized settlers. The attitude of the Government of West Bengal regarding the canal bank dwellers was never ethical. Even in the past when displacement took place in the canals of Tolly Nalah and Belegkata, the canal bank dwellers have simply driven away forcibly without any resettlement and compensation. The GoWB did not develop any policy for the resettlement of canal dwellers before this project. It is only because this project was aided by the ADB and its 'Policy on Involuntary Resettlement' was an obligation on the West Bengal Government that they had to consider resettling the canal bank dwellers who until now were just mere numbers for the politicians. Though on papers the policies have been very well implemented but the reality is far from what is put down in the papers.

The canal bank dwellers settle along the canals because they do not have any other option. They are not welcomed in the already settled bustees (slums) because the canal dwellers are mostly migrants from nearby districts and states. Thus they are only left with the option to

settle along the canal and build their shafts on the canals. Slowly and gradually they started depending on the habitation around that canal bank and their livelihood was totally based on the areas nearby. The canals which have been affected were situated mainly on the fringes of the city and these areas were very abruptly developed in the last decade. Sky scrapers, highways, and flyovers were constructed in the vicinity of the canals. The beautification of the city, therefore, demanded that these canal bank dwellers be pushed off their habitats. Though the ADB document on resettlement states that resettlement should be minimized, but nothing was done to stop the resettlement of these canal bank dwellers pushing them into conditions where they lost their livelihoods and income.

Most of the canal bank dwellers survived depending on the locality. Many of them had their shops on the canal banks along with their homes. There were grocery shops, furniture shops, barber store, cigarette stalls, tea and snack stalls, shops for building materials, vegetable, milk, fish, meat stalls, stationary shops on the canal banks which catered to the needs of the permanent dwellers settled on both sides of the canals. Women folk mainly worked as domestic help in the nearby areas. Those who did not have shops worked as rickshaw and van pullers, electricians, plumbers, masons, etc and were part of the informal unorganized sector. They had built houses with two-three rooms with thatched roofs. Some houses even had more rooms and they used to run a small business from their own houses. The women worked in the nearby areas and were accustomed to the prevailing culture of that area. Men who worked as plumbers, electricians, etc were recognized in the area and they got work easily in those areas.

After the loan agreement was signed in 2000, the resettlement plan was worked out by the KEIP keeping in mind the policy of ADB. Documents were prepared in order to provide resettlement to all those who were affected. In the verification survey carried out in 2005, it was found that the improvement works would affect 16,317 persons of which 8,096 are females. The survey found that the monthly income of the 89% households ranges from Rs 1500 and Rs 5000 whereas the monthly expenditure of 90% household is Rs 1000- Rs 2487. The number of shops which would be affected would be 449. Though these numbers are reported on the documents the lives of much more have been affected by the displacement.

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS BEFORE PLANNING STAGE AND BEFORE RESETTLEMENT

From the very beginning, there was no transparency in the project. After the loan agreement was signed in 2000, the responsibility of distributing photo identity cards was given to an NGO and it was done under the observation of KEIP. The officials visited the areas and clicked the photos of one male member of every household. The people residing on the canals were never

explained or informed the reason for which their photos were being clicked. They were very faintly told that they might have to shift but the people were never given any notice in writing. At the time of distributing photo identity cards, the family size was never taken into consideration. Families with 10 members were given one identity card and families with 3 members were also given one identity card. Initially, it was decided that for each family of five, 183sqft of the flat would be provided. It was also said that for each family with more than three adults 215 sq ft of land will be provided. Very soon the KEIP abandoned this 'land based resettlement policy'. Later on, when the affected families got flats they realized that one identity card meant one flat and thus families with 10 members were also given one flat.

After 2005, officials from both KEIP and the NGO started coming and they started conducting meetings with the canal bank dwellers. Initially, the people were told that they would be given land and monetary compensation as they have to occupy the canal banks. The people who would be displaced did not get to know the reason for which they are being displaced. The officials never told them that the canals need to be de-silted and dredged. They were never involved in the planning of the project which is a provision for involuntary resettlement. Later, the canal bank dwellers were informed by the officials that they were illegal occupants and they have no right to stay on the canal banks. They were constantly reprimanded for being encroachers. The officials threatened them continuously by saying that they would be displaced and would not be given any compensation if they did not move to the flats built for them. They were informed very late about the exact location of the resettlement sites.

The project reports claim that there was continuous consultation with the affected persons from the planning stage of the project. The Project Completion Report declares, "During stakeholder consultation, separate discussions were held with women to gain information on such gender issues such as appropriate entitlements, formation and role of user groups, self-help groups, and field-level monitoring committees." But the affected persons narrated something contrary to this. Most of the women expressed their anguish by saying that they were called to meetings where officials from the KEIP spoke about the benefits of the resettlement. The women insisted that they were never allowed to speak in these meetings and even if they were allowed to speak, their concerns were never answered. The women pointed out strongly that they were never consulted during the planning of the project. It was only in 2007 they got to hear that they would be given one flat in exchange of their shops and homes. Those who had both would also be given one flat in exchange. When people raised this concern in the meetings, the officials did not do anything to assure them that their livelihoods would be taken care of. Later on, when the flats were distributed, they realized that was actually robbed of their livelihood. There was so much lack of transparency that the affected people were not

even shown their flats beforehand. They were promised that they would be given flats with two rooms, a kitchen, balcony and a toilet and not land as earlier told. The people did not even know that they were being given one room flats without kitchen completely different from what they had been promised. Their plight was never heard and the officials never paid heed to the concerns raised by the affected community.

IMPACTS OF THE RESETTLEMENT ON THE AFFECTED FAMILIES: AN ANALYSIS

The canal dwellers were given resettlement in five places, Kasba, Sampa Mirzanagar, Nonadanga, Kalagachia and Purba Putiary. After abandoning 'land based resettlement policy' KEIP subsequently decided to provide resettlement to the canal bank dwellers by constructing 3 and 4 storeyed buildings under the VAMBAY (Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojna) and the BSUP (Basic Services for Urban Poor) schemes of the Central Government of India. When the affected people were finally allotted the flats, it was found that a single- room flat was being provided to each family irrespective of its size or number of adults.

Location of the Resettlement Site

The resettlement planning document which was prepared by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation claims, "Relocation has been planned to keep the distance factor in view. No site for relocation is far from the original settlement; all within 2.5 kilometers, located in developing industrial and business areas of Kolkata. APs are thus being shifted close to their original settlements. This ensures that APs continue to remain near their sources of livelihoods and are thus saved from total disruption to their lives." Though the document claims that resettlement has been provided to all within 2.5 km, it is actually not the case. The document is prepared based on international laws which state that in case of displacement is inevitable the affected persons have to be relocated to within .8 to 2.5 km. But this raises a question as to why dwellers near Churial canal had to be relocated to the new flats at Kalagachia, 5 Km away, in spite of the fact that 5 bighas of land were available very near in Kalua Monja. In Kasba, Rajdanga, where resettlement has been provided to canal bank dwellers from five canal banks only two canal banks, was just within the distance of 2.5 km. All the other canals were at a distance of more than 4 km. From Nonadanga the canal bank from where displaced people have been brought was at least 3-4 km away. Even in Sampa Mirzanar most of the people were from a distance of 4-5 km. The affected people had repeatedly protested against giving them resettlement at such a distance from the canals. They spoke about this and raised their concerns even at the so called consultation programs carried out by the KEIP officials. But their

cries were never heard by the concerned authorities. The massive distance between the canal banks where they lived earlier and the new relocation site affected the income and livelihood of the affected people immensely.

Livelihood and Income

The ADB 'document on Involuntary Resettlement' very clearly states that the affected persons have to be compensated for their loss of income and livelihood. It was even stated that the affected people have to be supported so that their economic future is as decent with the project as without it. From the very beginning, this direction was neglected. As discussed earlier, it was always the attitude of the Government that the canal bank dwellers are illegal encroachers and they do not have the right to be resettled. The Government was very much interested to shoo them away as they were an eyesore to the beautification of the city. But due to some bindings from the ADB, the resettlement part could not be repudiated. The resettlement plan was designed at par with the ADB document but it was never materialized on the same lines. There are always two elements of resettlement, housing, and livelihood. Both need to be given equal importance as resettling communities already make them vulnerable socially and culturally. Therefore ample steps should be taken to provide them economic stability which they lose after resettlement. This is the only reason that the distance between the earlier place of settlement and the new site of resettlement has to be kept within 2-2.5 km so that their lives are not completely destabilized after relocating to the new place. In this project, though housing was given significance, the livelihood of the affected persons was never cared for.

Many canal bank dwellers had shops in addition to houses on the canal banks. They were also given only one flat in return of both the shop and the house. Therefore this automatically destroyed the livelihood of many. Initially, it was promised to them that those who had shops would be given ground floor flats so that they can continue their shops from the flats. This promise was never kept. As allocation of floors was decided through a lottery system and thus many of those who had shops were not given ground floor flats. Those who got ground floor flats also could not continue business from the same one room flat as the flat did not have enough space to live, leave alone any other activity. Many canal bank dwellers domesticated animals such as cows and hens when they lived on the banks of the canals. These animals were a source of income for the people. When they shifted to the flats they could no longer keep these animals due to lack of space and because the flat system did not allow them to keep them as many of them got upper floor flats.

The nature of their economic pursuits was such that they had to be in proximity to their homes. Almost all the women worked as domestic laborers. They had been living on the canal banks for years and were working in homes nearby. When they had to be resettled in a completely new area, they were at a loss. Many women did not get jobs for years as they did not know anyone in the new locality. There is a question of trust when it comes to hiring domestic workers. These women who had settled in these new areas were not known to any and therefore none gave them jobs. Some women chose to travel to their earlier place of work. This was a phenomenon in almost all the areas. The timings of their jobs were such that many of them had to travel back and from home as they were even homemakers needing to be back in order to take care of children and elderly. Some women have to walk to their places of work which take them an hour. Others who take rickshaws, buses, and autos spend Rs 30 on an average every day. Almost everywhere women complained that they had to reduce the number of homes where they worked for lack of time as they had to travel a long distance and this has impacted them immensely. This sudden loss of income for some and reduction of income for many in such times when inflation is at a high has made the womenfolk extremely vulnerable. This has even led to the loss of decision making of women in the households as women were not able to contribute equally to the expenses of the family. The existing patriarchal structure already subjugated women in their homes. But earlier they were at least respected and they had a say as they contributed equally to the expenses of the family but now this was even lost.

Men on the other hand mostly worked as electricians, plumbers, rickshaw pullers, etc. Their jobs also demanded them to be resettled in nearby areas. They had been working in the areas in the vicinity of the canals. People knew them and they had developed a relationship with the locals on the basis of trust. They even had the bargaining power as they were known to the locals. But resettlement pushed them to a completely new area where they were known to none. Many of the men also chose to travel to their earlier places of work in order to survive. This led to a rise in expenditure of the family as both the man and the woman had to travel in local conveyances. Overall the situation was really taxing for both men and women but was even more so for the women as they even had to do household chores, take care of the children and elderly apart from their work. Even now when they have stayed for 7-8 years in their new relocated sites, they are not economically stable. They have to travel a lot of distance in order to go to their jobs and many had to leave jobs because of this.

Conditions of the Infrastructure

The flats were between 163 and 190 sq ft in size. Each floor in the buildings has 8 flats. Each flat has one room which is 15.5 ft by 10 ft. There is a passage to the toilet which is a 6 ft by 3 ft space mostly used by many families as kitchen and a toilet which is 4 ft by 5 ft in size. The height of the room is 9 ft 2 in. The main door of the flat is made up of concrete with iron hinges while the toilet has a fiber door. There is just one window which is glass paned with iron grills and frames measuring 5 ft by 4 ft. the flats have their own separate electrical connections with separate meters and a water tap each. There is no separate kitchen in the flats. Every person had to pay Rs 5000 in order to get flat.

The affected people were given false promises about everything starting from the size of the flat to the area of resettlement. Most of the families consisted of more than 5 family members. The small size of the flat posed several difficulties for the women. Old women had to let their sons go and stay in separate houses as it was not possible for them to stay together in the small flat. This led to more economic pressure on the family as now they had to rent a place. Many old wailing mothers were left alone as their sons had to stay away for lack of space. Many women complained that they could not marry their sons due to lack of space and privacy. Another stark phenomenon which was noticed was that the girls were married off earlier as there was little space for them to stay. Women faced the most difficulties as they had to adjust the most. Many old women had to stay out of their homes after evenings in order to let the children of the housing study peacefully. Some women had to sleep on the beds so that their sons could sleep peacefully on the beds with their wives. As there is no separate kitchen so women had to use the small space near the toilet as the kitchen. The women had to manage in such a small space and some even cooked inside the room.

Within 3-4 months of taking possession of these flats, the occupants found out the flaws in the construction. As the flats were made for canal bank dwellers, they were very badly constructed. People noticed cracks on the walls very soon. The ceiling had signs of damp patches on them. The toilets started leaking from the very first month. There was no proper drainage system in the flats. The dwellers have been complaining about these and calling for repairs but their calls were never answered.

Each building has a tank on the terrace of the building. There is one water pump for every three-four blocks. These water pumps have to be operated through the common fund and the electricity bill paid for collectively. It has been found that Nonadanga E block is one pump for 26 blocks which means 208 flats. An occupant was operating the pump thrice a day and was not being paid for it.

Drinking water was a big problem for most of the households until recently. When the occupants shifted to the flats, there was no clean drinking water. In most of the places, people had to travel 25-30 minutes in order to get water and this continued for 8-9 years. Recently in all the areas, water taps have been installed which provides clean water for drinking. But the water taps are not sufficient in number. For 320 flats in Rajdanga, there are just two taps. In Sampa Mirzanagar for 320 flats, there is only one tap. There are regular fights over water collecting which make them one against the other. For years women folk had to carry water from so far which was never cared for. In some areas tankers used to be sent once a week to provide water to the people.

There are no vats for the dumping of wastes. There are no sweepers allotted from the KMC. These people are extremely poor and they do not have the money to keep sweepers on their own. Shallow septic tanks have been overflowing since years in Nonadanga and Sampa Mirzanagar. There is no one to listen to the president's woes. In Sampa, Mirzanagar waste is dumped just outside their homes which gave rise to several diseases in the residents. Heavy downpours meant knee deep water logging at the Sampa Mirzanagar complex. In most of the rainy seasons, water enters the ground floor flats. There are no proper roads in the complexes.

In Sampa Mirzanagar, the flats have been built on the bank of the canal. There is one wooden bridge which connects the buildings to the neighborhood. This wooden bridge is very weak and can collapse anytime. Residents have repeatedly complained to the local civic authorities regarding the bridge but none did anything in these 8 years after they shifted. Even in Nonadanga, there is a similar wooden bridge which has to be crossed in order to reach the complex. The bridge makes it more difficult when someone has to be taken to hospital urgently. Recently, a person in Sampa Mirzanagar died because the ambulance could not cross the wooden bridge. Several women complained that they had to suffer during pregnancy as they did not get ambulances to take them to hospitals as the ambulances could not reach the complex due to the wooden bridge.

Water gets easily deposited in the complex and does not get drained easily as the drainage system is faulty. This along with the deposits of waste has led to many mosquito borne diseases in the area. In the last rainy season, residents of Sampa Mirzanagar, Nonadanga and Kalagachia reported several cases of dengue and malaria. Children are mostly affected by these diseases as they play outside their homes. Another difficulty which these flats face is the lack of ventilation. As there is just one window and the buildings are very close to each other, proper flow of air is not possible. Many flats mostly the ground floor ones never get exposed to sunlight and this leads to even more diseases in children and women as they spend the most amount of time in homes.

Conditions of Facilities

Unlike all the places, only Rajdanga is well connected by local conveyance. The house complexes in Sampa Mirzanagar, Nonadanga and Kalagachhia are situated in a way disconnected to the main city. There are no proper conveyances to these places. One cannot find any local conveyance after sunset. Therefore women who travel back from work after sunset find it very difficult to travel. There are no health centers near any of the sites. It is very difficult for women and children to travel at least 3 km to find a hospital. Pregnant women are troubled more because of the lack of hospitals nearby. Rajdanga and Nonadanga have private hospitals nearby which they cannot afford. The project did not pay any attention to providing basic health care amenities to the resettled people.

Another problem with the sites of resettlement is that there are no schools nearby. Children from Rajdanga, Nonadanga, Sampa Mirzanar, Klagachia have to travel miles to reach schools. Some children walk to schools which are another matter of insecurity in the parents. Some other children take buses which mean increased expenditure in the family. Children also have to spend Rs 30 on an average per day to travel to and back from schools. In some cases, women have to take the small children to schools which make it even difficult for them to manage their work in outside home. Some children had to be admitted to nearby private schools with high fees as they could not travel all by themselves and had no one to accompany them to schools. Several women informed that during the displacement several children had to drop out of schools as they had to shift to their resettlement sites in hurry and it was not possible for them to spend money to admit students in the middle of the sessions. Many students also had to lose a year or two because of the same reason. Children are affected in more ways than this. Due to lack of space children's studies are often affected. Many students had to drop out due to the distance they had to travel to reach schools.

When asked about markets located nearby, most of the residents complained that they were also situated quite far. Apart from Rajdanga, none of the places had access to markets nearby. Mostly women had to travel to markets which were quite far. The markets are situated at the rich localities and therefore prices of day to day utilities are generally high as compared to the canal banks.

Increased Cost of Living

It is quite clear that the expenditure of the family has increased due to the resettlement in areas which had no access to hospitals, work, schools, markets, etc. When asked about the increase in expenditure most of the affected families agreed on the fact that the resettlement

has made them more economically weaker and unstable. The increased cost of traveling is one big expenditure which affects them. Another increased expenditure is the monthly maintenance which they have to shell out for the collective expense in the buildings. This was never a concern for them when they lived on the canal banks. In addition to this, water pumps have to be repaired in every three months as the quality of the water pumps which are installed is really substandard. When they were told about the resettlement, they were never informed about these expenditures.

In the beginning, the amount for each unit of electricity was subsidized and was kept lower than what is normal for the resettled people. But soon they also started being charged the same amount per unit as the other people in the locality. The promise which was made to them that they would be given electricity at a subsidized rate was also violated. Right now they have to shell out Rs 800-Rs 1000 on an average every month when their average income is only Rs 4000-5000 per month. Some families earn even less and it is extremely difficult to maintain these new expenses at the new resettlement site.

Some women complained that they never used gas for cooking when they lived on the canal banks but have to use it as it is not possible for them to cook on wood in the small flats. The increased cost of living and the decreased provision for work has left the people in extreme misery.

Legal Status of the Rehabilitation

The affected persons were given these flats for Rs 5000 each. They were provided with legal papers for the flats. These papers mentioned that the flats were given on a lease of 99 years and these people were not owners of the flats. Most of the affected people do not understand the difference between ownership and lease. They do not understand that even now they are not rightful owners of the flats. It is strictly mentioned in the papers that these flats cannot be rented to or sold to anyone. Therefore those who are big families cannot rent these flats and take some other place on rent as they cannot stay in these flats for lack of space. Neither do they have a right to sell these flats even if they are in urgent need of money.

Findings on Implementation of the Gender Policy in the Project

This research attempts to understand the impacts of the development processes on women specifically. Though any development project which displaces a huge number of people, affects

both men and women, it affects the women folk and children even more as these are the most vulnerable sections of the society. ADB has gender policies which recommend that women be included in the project from the initial stage in order to check gender discrimination. The GAD policy of ADB not only tries to check gender discrimination but also vows to mainstream gender in all its projects. ADB has made a transition from its WID approach to GAD approach in order to

“include women’s rights, women’s role as active participants and agents in development, and their role as actors with a specific agenda for development”. Special emphasis is led on mainstreaming gender in all the projects which mean that participation of women in the decision-making process will be encouraged. This element was totally missing when this project is concerned. The women were neither involved in the decision making of the resettlement planning nor were they included in the feasibility study. To be precise, women were not even informed about the details of the project till a very long time. They were involved in some meetings which were conducted a long time after the resettlement plan was already devised. The meetings with the affected community were more like a ritual and it did not address the concerns of the women. It has already been discussed that how women were affected due to a problematic resettlement plan. Women’s lives are in jeopardy and they feel more insecure because of this project. They lost their income and livelihood making them economically weaker.

CONCLUSION

This project exposes the dangerous face of development projects which claims to improve lives of people. Instead of making people’s lives easier, these projects destabilize them and make them more vulnerable. The project documents relentlessly asserted that it tried to mainstream gender in order to check disparity. This was however challenged by the women who were affected due to displacement. The concerns of the women were never heard from the very start of this project. The project report claims the success of the project and reports that all the objectives it strived to achieve were successful. The project claimed to achieve all its objectives when it ended in 2013 but KMC had to ask for a loan from ADB again in three tranches in 2014. The new project which is also called Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project also focuses on components which the earlier project claimed to have already achieved. When the KEIP official was questioned in this regard, he answered that they plan to include new areas where those components would be targeted. The KEIP official Mr. Soumo Ghosh maintained that the earlier project was completely successful and all the objectives it targeted were achieved.

Though he maintained this, there is not much difference in the areas the project claimed to have improved during the rains. These areas still face rampant water logging during the rainy season and not much has been done to check this. Even the canals which were to be improved and because of which so many people had to be resettled continue to remain in the same situation as they were 10 years back. Only some parts of the canals have been repaired. Currently, the canal banks have again become homes to several people. People have again started settling on the canal banks. Therefore, the question remains as to why so many people had to be displaced in the first place. It could have been easily possible for them to carry on the canal works without disturbing the lives of the thousands of people who depend on the canals for their living and sustenance.



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