



## **India: A tale of rehabilitation of people displaced due to dam construction**

**A. Mukerjee**

Director (Budget and Financial Management Information Systems) and Additional Secretary, Finance Department, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Mantralaya, Vallabh Bhawan, Bhopal, M.P., India-462004 (aniruddhem@yahoo.com) (+91-755-2441727, Fax - +91-755-2550226)

The construction of the Bargi Dam (1971-1990) on the river Narmada affected 27432 ha of land and displaced 5,475 families. Initially provision was made only for payment of compensation for land and property. The lack of planning for human problems led eventually to an agitation lasting over several years. On receiving complaints from the affected people the Commissioner of Social Welfare intervened in 1986 and convinced the state to prepare a rehabilitation plan of Rs.100 million (US\$ 2 million). Delay and mismanagement, including rehabilitation work in places not affected by the dam, led to the displaced people coming together to form a Union. Demonstrations began in 1992, demanding fishing rights and protesting against the complete filling up of the dam. In 1994, the Chief Minister met the displaced people, accepted responsibility for rehabilitation, and agreed to some of the demands. To speed up the works, a divisional level planning committee was set up which drew up a rehabilitation plan, but its implementation was held up due to delays in obtaining funding. In 1996, violent demonstrations resumed demanding reduction of the reservoir water level. The Chief Secretary visited the affected area, met the Union, and agreed to demands. The cycle of non-implementation, agitation and subsequent agreement to some demands was repeated in 1997. Since then rehabilitation work has been carried out in cooperation between the Union and the government. The state has been providing about Rs.14.5 million (US\$ 0.3 million) every year since 1998. A number of rehabilitation steps have been completed, including distribution of residential plots, allotment of drawdown land and construction of infrastructure as per the master plan prepared in

consultation with the Union. On the whole the displaced people appear satisfied with the measures taken by the government and are cooperating in their implementation. Lessons Learned and Replicability ¶ Need for a well prepared rehabilitation policy to be included in the project plans, which is to be adopted uniformly. ¶ Need for proper dialogue with the affected persons during the plan stage itself to prevent problems during execution. ¶ Need to have some flexibility in rehabilitation policies to allow changes as per local needs, and need for quick decision making at the lowest practical level regarding such changes. ¶ Need for political interventions if the process is not effectively in place. ¶ The routine government style of obtaining funds for executing sensitive rehabilitation projects can lead to resentment among the people resulting in law and order problems. Decentralization of powers to the field level with speedy execution is imperative in such cases. ¶ There is need for a cooperative institutions with representative of concerned government departments and displaced people who have shifted to the rehabilitation site to address the grievances of the people in a proper manner. Importance of Case It is a truism that planning for big multipurpose projects should incorporate considerations for human problems such as displacement of people and their loss of livelihood. This case illustrates how a neglect of this can lead to long-drawn conflict situations that may eventually be resolved by resorting to original planning principles and IWRM.