



Evaluating Benefit-Sharing and Resettlement Impacts: A Case Study of the Mangla Dam Raising Hydropower Project

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of benefit-sharing arrangements in the resettlement of the Mangla Dam Raising Hydropower Project, focusing on the processes by which the resettlement planning and execution were carried out. Additionally, the study aims to identify the challenges and nature of the benefit-sharing programs provided in the MDRP resettlement. A qualitative approach was employed to explore the perceptions of local communities and to identify the direct and indirect benefits of this project's implementation. The study was conducted in New Mirpur City, where a significant number of people were affected by the project. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, incorporating local and demographic contexts, the research found that while some individuals benefited from the project by comparing their new lifestyle, many did not receive adequate compensation and continued to express grievances. The results indicate that the expectations of widespread satisfaction among the affected people were not met, and it was also revealed that the newly settled area remains underdeveloped with significant unfinished work. The findings highlight a need for more transparent and inclusive benefit-sharing mechanisms in large-scale resettlement projects. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of addressing the long-term socio-economic impacts on the resettled communities to ensure sustainable development.

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1.0 Introduction

Development in the modern age brings significant benefits but often comes at a great human cost. Mega development projects like hydropower projects, despite their advantages such as power generation, irrigation supplies, fisheries development, water supply, tourism development, royalties, and flood control, have adverse impacts on local communities, especially in the form of involuntary resettlement (Aqsa et al., 2024). The primary stakeholders of hydropower ventures, including governments and societies, typically benefit differently compared to the project-affected communities who bear the majority of the negative effects (Ansar et al., 2014). These communities often face financial and social losses, as evidenced by historical cases like the involuntary resettlement caused by hydropower projects in India and China, which displaced over 21 million people between 1950 and 1990 (Hennig et al., 2023). The World Commission on Dams, formed in 1998, highlighted the social costs of mega dam projects and emphasized the need for substantial participation of affected communities to mitigate these impacts. Involuntary resettlement leads to significant socio-economic catastrophes if unmitigated, as people lose productive income streams, are resettled to areas incompatible with their skills, and face disruption of social institutions and community networks (Dams, 2000).

The impacts of resettlement include the loss of physical and non-physical assets, such as homes, communities, arable lands, income streams, subsistence resources, cultural identity, social structures, mutual networks, and cultural sites. This displacement constrains livelihoods and erodes chances for sustainable development. With around 15 million people displaced from their native lands due to development projects, the magnitude of suffering is evident (Agba et al., 2010). Hydropower projects, which have caused nearly 80 million people to be relocated globally, result in significant adverse social, economic, environmental, and ecological impacts on communities (Van Cleef, 2016). These impacts can only be mitigated by benefit-sharing arrangements, which ensure that local communities directly benefit from hydropower development. Benefit sharing can enhance sustainability and foster local development by addressing the adverse effects of displacement. Some hydropower projects have experimented with this approach, demonstrating its potential to gain local support and achieve greater public consideration (Moran et al., 2018).

However, Pakistan lacks a comprehensive policy or legal framework for dealing with resettlement issues holistically. The resettlement and rehabilitation of affected people from developmental projects such as dams has never been a priority for the government, resulting in social unrest and reluctance from donors. The history and practice of resettlement in Pakistan reveal serious flaws. For example, in 1967, the Mangla Dam project and in 1974, the Tarbela Dam project displaced thousands of people, and their resettlement issues have yet to be resolved. Similarly, the Ghazi Barotha Hydro Project and the Diamer-Bhasha Dam have displaced hundreds of families, often followed by lengthy legal battles and incomplete resettlement programs. This is compounded by the fact that the Dasu Hydropower Project, which is currently being implemented, is expected to displace 768 households across 35 villages.

These issues were exacerbated by the Mangla Dam Raising Project, resulting in an involuntary migration of over 41,000 people. The current study sought to investigate how the

MDRP resettlement process and benefit-sharing programs influenced the outcome. The question is whether the program has improved the prosperity of affected communities through increased income and livelihood opportunities, or whether it has worsened their socioeconomic status. The study identifies potential obstacles and risks in current resettlement practices that may impede progress toward the restoration of sustainable livelihoods. The key lessons learned by stakeholders are examined in order to make recommendations and innovations for future benefit-sharing in resettlement efforts.

The current study focuses on the social implications of the MDRP resettlement program. The Mangla Dam is critical to Pakistan's irrigation and power sectors, as it supports the entire irrigation system. The dam's construction displaced approximately 45,500 people as well as numerous buildings and structures. Though the resettlement will benefit the locals in a variety of ways, it will also present additional challenges. This study will also look for gaps in resettlement and benefit sharing that could serve as a foundation for future research and practices in this field. It seeks to analyze how project affected reacted to the MDRP, investigate how they participated in the project's planning and implementation, and document their experiences, which should serve as a model for future resettlement interventions.

2.0 Literature Review

The World Bank's resettlement strategy is widely criticized for being ineffective. This is because this bank's standards place a greater emphasis on project planning and design than on properly implementing and monitoring practices. According to the WCD, in the majority of cases, the Bank's guidelines are inadequate to ensure that resettlement processes are carried out effectively (Cernea, 2003). According to the WCD Report (2000), World Bank resettlement standards place a greater emphasis on prior planning stages and pay less attention to the critical monitoring and assessment steps required for the implementation of such pre-planned resettlements. This monitoring failure reveals a significant gap between actual protection and restoration of livelihoods for displaced people, leaving them with insufficient recovery and livelihood at the resettlement site (Udall, 2024).

The WCD report is a scathing critique of the World Bank's approach, emphasizing the importance of strong national legislation and strengthening implementation agencies for effective resettlement. These WCD guidelines advocate for a much more in-depth and systematic approach to considering all potential effects of displacement, including economic, physical, and environmental consequences for displaced groups within society (Gyger, 2024). These guidelines, therefore, imply a more integrated approach beyond simple compensation to ensure that the facility for restoration or betterment of living standards of the displaced to their pre-loss state is within reach (Kälin & Chapuisat, 2018).

In contrast, UN guidelines on internal displacement take into account the plight of people who are forced to flee their homes but remain in their home country. This guideline protects the rights of IDPs while also ensuring their rehabilitation. They also emphasize that the process of restoring livelihoods and restoring access to services and other necessities will be facilitated by targeted support for IDPs, which is currently consistent with a growing global recognition of the

need for a much more structured and rights-based approach to dealing with internal displacement (Rahul, 2024).

The ADB, for its part, has developed a comprehensive framework for dealing with involuntary resettlement in its 2009 Safeguard Policy Statement. The ADB's approach is broad-based, with the goal of minimizing the need for resettlement and restoring or improving the livelihoods of those affected. The SPS principles address both physical and economic displacement, with a focus on how resettlement can contribute to long-term development and poverty reduction. This policy is part of a larger commitment to integrating resettlement into the overall development process in order to improve long-term outcomes for those who have been displaced (ADB, 2009).

Resettlement practices in Pakistan are influenced by historical and legislative factors. The LAA of 1894, a legacy of the British era, remains the core legislation governing land acquisition. This act and its accompanying rules do not clearly define comprehensive resettlement needs, such as livelihood restoration and public consultation. The Environmental Protection Agency issued a National Resettlement Policy in 2002 to address some of these issues, but it is still incomplete due to a lack of consensus and finalization. This policy is intended to supplement the LAA by providing guidelines for resettlement planning and implementation, though it has yet to be fully adopted and operationalized (Van Wicklin, 2018).

The concept of benefit sharing in resettlement is critical to ensuring that the benefits of development projects are distributed equitably among the affected parties. The World Bank's new vision for hydropower, which goes beyond simply generating electricity, is especially important for benefit-sharing mechanisms because it recognizes the potential for poverty alleviation and long-term development (Cernea, 2008). The use of benefit-sharing mechanisms ensures that benefits accrue to local communities, including those displaced by the project: in other words, that the projects demonstrate real benefits in terms of improving livelihoods (Diop et al., 2009).

However, this literature highlights enormous challenges in the area of resettlement, particularly the lack of more effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Despite the establishment of numerous frameworks and guidelines, gaps in the protection and support of displaced populations remain. An integrated approach, grounded in both international standards and strong local policies, will yield practical, if successful, and equitable resettlement outcomes.

3.0 Methodology

The qualitative research methodology was heavily relied on in the study's investigation of the uses, values, and meanings associated with benefit-sharing mechanisms within hydropower projects and resettlement processes. This helps to understand the larger context of benefit sharing and resettlement in such projects. On this note, the qualitative research approach will allow for the capture of subjective experiences and meanings associated with resettlement that quantitative methods cannot capture or address. The methodology chosen will be based on the interpretive paradigm, allowing for a thorough understanding of the social phenomenon from the perspective of those most affected.

Qualitative research focuses on subjective experiences and social constructions of reality.

It looks for the meanings and values that people and communities assign to their experiences. This interpretive approach allows us to learn in depth how those affected by MDRP perceive and experience benefit-sharing practices and resettlement processes. While positivist approaches emphasize objectivity and generalizability, interpretive research focuses on understanding the complexities of social interactions as well as participants' subjective realities.

This approach will aid in understanding the complexities of resettlement and benefit-sharing by investigating how individuals and communities make sense of such experiences within the social context of the hydropower project. The study focuses on the affected population's lived experiences to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics at play. This approach is particularly useful for studying phenomena that are context-dependent and have complex social processes, such as this.

The case study approach is based on a constructivist paradigm that emphasizes subjective human experiences and meaning. The Mangla Dam Raising Project case study is an attempt to gain a better understanding of how the affected population experiences and interprets the benefit-sharing and resettlement processes. This allows for a more in-depth exploration of the social interactions, processes, and events associated with resettlement and benefit-sharing mechanisms. The research site was carefully chosen to ensure that the study focuses on a context in which the phenomena under investigation are common. The Mangla Dam Raising Project area was chosen for its high significance in terms of resettlement and benefit-sharing issues. The dam, located on the Jhelum River, recently underwent an upgrade and expansion project, which will displace approximately 45,000 people and affect 12,815 houses and other structures. This site was chosen because it provides a relevant and rich context for investigating the impacts of resettlement and benefit sharing mechanisms.

In-depth, semi structured interviews with local communities affected by the Mangla Dam Raising Project served as the primary data collection method for this study. Semi-structured interviews are ideal for qualitative research because they allow participants to explore their experiences and perspectives in a flexible and open-ended way. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit detailed accounts of participants' views on benefit-sharing, resettlement patterns, and WAPDA's role in the resettlement process. The interviewing guide was carefully designed to include open-ended questions that cover various aspects of the research topic. This guide provided a framework for the interview while also allowing participants to express themselves freely. These interviews lasted 45 minutes to three hours and were recorded using a digital voice recorder. In addition to the recording, written notes were taken to capture any additional observations or insights.

Some strategies were implemented to gain access to the research site and conduct fieldwork in an appropriate manner. This included negotiations, rapport building, and disclosure. This entailed developing a trusting relationship and creating an environment in which one could comfortably share his or her experiences. Introducing the researcher and explaining the purpose of the study aimed to elicit cooperation and openness from the participants. Gate-keeping is another important aspect of fieldwork. These gatekeepers, who have formal and sometimes informal

authority, control access to the study site. Thus, relationships with gatekeepers were established to facilitate entry into the field while also ensuring smooth interaction with participants. The researcher bargained for both access to the research site and interviews with WAPDA officials and other relevant administrators in the settings.

The ethical issues were not ignored throughout the research process. The participants provided informed consent, which meant that they were fully aware of the study's purpose, how it would be conducted, and their right to withdraw at any time. The participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected by anonymizing their responses and data storage. The British Sociological Association provided ethical guidelines that ensured the research's integrity. Experiences in the field ranged from approaching key stakeholders to cultivating relationships with participants. Despite these challenges, the researcher found the participants to be very cooperative and eager to share their experiences. Further engagement with MDRP officials and senior management was conducted to gain a better understanding of the project's impact and the effectiveness of benefit-sharing mechanisms.

The final step in this research was to transcribe and analyze the qualitative data collected during fieldwork. The themes were identified and analyzed using the thematic analysis method. This approach allowed for analysis, in which data was sorted and analyzed based on emergent themes and topics relevant to the research questions. In summary, the methodology presented in this chapter provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the resettlement benefits of the Mangla Dam Raising Project. Benefit-sharing and resettlement complexities were thus captured through the use of qualitative research methods and the interpretive approach used in this study's methodology. Case study research, in-depth interviews, and ethical considerations ensure a thorough and nuanced examination of the research topic. Further sections will present a thematic analysis of the case study, as well as some conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Disclosure of Project and Community Response

Consultation with stakeholders is part of the process for starting a project that includes environmental and socioeconomic impact assessments. It includes public meetings and early engagement, which may improve public perception. If a project is to be socially viable, it must meet the social, cultural, and economic needs of the affected communities. Continuous dialogue is required in the process of disclosing project details to all stakeholders, including affected communities and government agencies. A number of issues were identified during the interviews, including a lack of information, poor interaction with authorities, and insufficient services.

Responses from the displaced community were varied:

“We were not properly informed by the government...we heard the news on the radio, but it was unclear when we would need to leave and what compensation to expect.”

“At first, we felt very frustrated...but we agreed for the sake of our people and country.”

“We were deprived of our culture...we were not sure about what to give our future generation.”

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generation.”

Women, as the most vulnerable group in displacement, are more likely to become impoverished. One of the World Bank's goals is to reduce gender disparities and increase women's participation in economic development. Members of this community were initially distraught over the loss of their homes and connections.

4.2 Resettlement Planning and Resettlement Process

The following section discusses the MDRP's planning and resettlement implementation, which is regarded as a large-scale project involving compensation resettlement. As a result of the resettlement, the communities are now settled in new locations with better facilities. GoA&K and WAPDA oversaw the resettlement. After the relocation, the resettled communities' infrastructure improves, as does their access to support services. The Pakistan Resettlement Policy identifies twenty-three principles that must be addressed in a resettlement action plan. This policy focuses on stakeholder participation, which includes affected communities, as well as transparent and participatory compensation processes. Special attention will be given to vulnerable groups such as the disabled, widows, and impoverished families.

A respondent mentioned:

“We were informed about the resettlement process through notifications, and WAPDA teams visited us to prepare for relocation. We had limited knowledge about the project, so we consulted the MDRP commissioner.”

WAPDA aimed to ensure a smooth process, offering reasonable compensation and facilitating the construction of new homes and businesses on newly allocated land. Gender considerations were incorporated into the resettlement process:

“In our social setting, men are prioritized, but this resettlement process was fair to both men and women.”

The resettlement often brings significant social changes, and many affected individuals were initially reluctant to relocate due to their lack of resources and adaptation challenges. However, most accepted the relocation due to the compensation provided.

One respondent noted:

“The Kashmiri refugees and other vulnerable groups received compensation to restart their lives. Women heads of households were treated equally.”

Effective resettlement includes support services like training and microfinance to help displaced people transition. The MDRP has seen some success in this area, but issues with grievance redressal persist. Many complaints about compensation and the resettlement process remain unresolved.

“No one checked on our compensation status after the process. Authorities did not address our concerns adequately.”

In summary, while the MDRP has provided various benefits, including infrastructure improvements and compensation, unresolved grievances and delays in compensation continue to affect many displaced individuals. The grievance redressal mechanism has been insufficient, leading to ongoing legal disputes.

4.3 Grievances, Resettlement, and Benefit Sharing

A grievance redressal mechanism is in place to address complaints about project activities and compensation. Displaced persons (DPs) are informed about their rights and how to file complaints, with efforts to involve them in planning to prevent issues. However, local authorities often fail to address DPs' needs adequately, leading to dissatisfaction and a sense of neglect.

"We don't expect much from authorities but at least they should realize in what pain we are living and what are their roles and responsibilities"

Grievances are ideally resolved through project administration or local dispute resolution mechanisms. A grievance redressal committee and complaint register help track and address issues, as highlighted by a respondent:

"We filed a complaint with the grievance redressal committee about the rumors of getting the affected people settled at scattered location."

Resettlement efforts have generally improved living conditions, with new settlements offering modern amenities and better infrastructure. Many resettled individuals are satisfied, as one respondent shared:

"We are very thankful to the Govt. of Azad Kashmir and Govt. of Pakistan that they have provided us shelter and given us such a reasonable place to live in"

Despite these improvements, some individuals, especially those from agricultural backgrounds, face difficulties adapting to new environments and jobs. As one respondent mentioned:

"We owned 2 acres agricultural land which we lost in the dam rising. We have only the farming profession skills. Now we are helpless to choose another kind of work"

4.4 Indirect Positive and Negative Implications

Satisfactory planning and responsibility from the undertaking advocates are crucial for ensuring that local communities share the social and economic benefits of hydropower projects. If benefit sharing is not properly managed, negative effects can be significant. Positive benefits, however, can be enhanced if projects favor local communities by providing new social and economic opportunities. In the case of the MDRP, several indirect benefits have been noted, such as improved infrastructure and services like carpeted roads, bridges, electricity, and community networks. This project has not only benefited local communities but also provided collective benefits to a broader population. As one respondent observed:

"This project has wider negative effects on the local communities but also provides collective benefits. There are parks, water filter stations, schools, and health centers, not just for the affectees but for everyone"

Interviews reveal both direct and indirect benefits for the affected communities. The hydropower project has introduced economic changes in the area, including infrastructure improvements like roads, schools, and hospitals. Yet, some respondents expressed concerns about job losses and the lack of employment strategies for the affected individuals. One respondent mentioned:

"Although this project is beneficial for specific people, we face difficulties traveling for

jobs and many remain unemployed because the project didn't provide employment strategies for the affectees."

The project's success in livelihood restoration is questioned, with people still struggling for jobs and income. The influx of external workers during the construction phase caused tensions with local populations, and incomplete construction work continues to create problems. As noted by another respondent:

"There was too much noise and dust during construction, and now there are still incomplete works creating problems for us."

Moreover, the project's benefits did not fully align with the policy on Involuntary Resettlement (OP 4.12), which aims for resettlement activities to be sustainable and provide adequate resources for displaced persons to benefit from the project. Respondents reported issues with compensation and environmental considerations, with one stating:

"Yes, we are allowed to cultivate on our former lands, but our crops were destroyed when the water level was raised. We cannot afford to risk cultivating there again."

4.5 Future Challenges and Prospects

Dams are built to meet water and energy needs, contributing to national development. While the benefit-sharing approach is practiced, local communities have identified some shortcomings. Despite opposition, the MDRP has introduced modern amenities and the potential for community development. In addition, Community development initiatives, such as vocational training centers, are seen as crucial but need to be maintained. Some resettled individuals view these changes positively. Different respondents noted:

"There is a short-term benefit from this project, but it cannot increase water storage capacity in the future. The government made a wrong decision, and many people remain in poverty and hope for housing."

"I'm resettled in a new city and enjoying modern lifestyles. It was a significant sacrifice, but it seems like a good opportunity for us."

"I hope the community development initiatives will be successful. Vocational training centers are important, but their maintenance is key."

Sustainable development remains a core aspect of the benefit-sharing program. While the benefits provided are seen as satisfactory, the project's sustainability and whether it meets the goals set for approval and financing are essential considerations.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the Mangla Dam Raising Project highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of resettlement and benefit-sharing activities associated with large infrastructure projects. Stakeholder consultation and timely disclosure of project information are therefore critical. The diverse community responses revealed a lack of proper communication and involvement in the early stages, leaving them confused and frustrated. Women, in particular, faced greater risks because they are in a more vulnerable position in society. The failures in information provision and the resulting psychological consequences highlight the need for more comprehensive and open stakeholder consultation procedures.

The resettlement process painted a bleak picture of providing modern amenities and infrastructure upgrades. Despite GoA&K and WAPDA's collaborative efforts to make it smooth and trouble-free, a slew of issues arose before the community. While gender concerns were addressed fairly and compensation was awarded, the process lacked adequate support services and timely resolution of grievances. Many DPs felt ignored, and unresolved grievances added to dissatisfaction. The policy framework aimed at ensuring 'just resettlement' proved ineffective in practice, as evidenced by ongoing legal battles and complaints.

While the grievance redressal mechanism was intended to address issues and integrate DPs into the planning process, it fell short during implementation. The complaints about compensation and resettlement continued unabated, highlighting the gap between policy and practice. While much better living conditions and infrastructure were guaranteed in the new settlements than before, resettled families from agricultural backgrounds faced significant adaptation challenges, emphasizing the need for special supportive measures. The community's feelings of neglect and frustration are due to the lack of effective redressal of these issues.

Indirectly, the MDRP had both positive and negative effects. Notable benefits included improved infrastructure and services, such as roads, electricity, and community networks. However, it resulted in job losses and insufficient employment strategies for those affected. Construction disrupted the environment and social life, and unfinished work continued to cause issues. The benefits compensated for or provided environmental considerations that did not fully align with the World Bank's resettlement policies.

The MDRP's future challenges will be to sustain its gains while also addressing identified gaps. Community development-oriented activities in vocational training centers, for example, can only be boosted if new facilities established as part of the project are properly maintained. While achieving sustainable development has been and continues to be an important goal of any development intervention, the project's ability to meet the originally set goals for which it was approved and funded is an important consideration. Mixed reactions from the community highlight the need for ongoing efforts and innovations in resettlement and benefit-sharing.

The MDRP analysis reveals how complex resettlement and benefit-sharing activities truly are. While there are numerous benefits to the project, a number of issues remain. Effective communication, participatory processes, tailored support services, and an effective grievance redressal mechanism are viewed as necessary for project success. These mixed community responses make a case for mitigating both direct and indirect impacts and distributing development benefits equitably over time.

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