Cernea, Michael: (INDR) International Network on Displacement and Resettlement
cerneam@gmail.com

Authors: Michael M. Cernea, (INDR) International Network on Displacement and Resettlement

Title: Sustainability and its Risks

Current global trends announce unprecedented mega-investments forthcoming in infrastructure projects that are defined upfront as socially and environmentally sustainable; however, infrastructure projects are known to require forced population displacements that are creating a legacy of both "gainers" and “losers”,-- albeit in different proportions. The investments in large infrastructure projects bring sustainable benefits to many “gainers” livelihoods, while decreasing or destroying the sustainability of the livelihood of large numbers of “losers” (the populations forcibly displaced and uprooted). This paper explores the responsibilities of the drivers of Development-caused Forced Displacement and involuntary Resettlement (DFDR) processes (governments, international development agencies, private sector corporations) -- for anticipating and planning ex-ante to prevent, reduce, and eliminate the typical clusters of risks-cum-adverse impacts to the social sustainability of infrastructure projects, and especially on the livelihood of the populations forcibly displaced. The general problem our study addresses is the ubiquitous DFDR processes occurring in the category of large infrastructure projects. The generality of this grave problem results from the fact that the first step of each infrastructure project is obtaining the right-of-way for its multiple footprint(s), most of which are located in or near inhabited areas. Our study finds that the DFDR process tends to become the project’s single most complex social-sustainability problem. The conservatively estimated number of development-displaced people globally is 200-250 million people per decade. The paper’s specific focus is on identifying the generic risks to sustainability risks of projects that are deliberately predicated on implementing DFDR processes. These includes clusters of social, economic, and financial risks, as well as risks to political stability (e.g., landlessness; homelessness, joblessness, social disarticulation, a.o). Lack of transparency is hiding the real life magnitude of displacement and of the legacy of unresolved problems of such projects.

Our empirical basis are data on DFDR successes and failures reported in public agency documents, private corporations, and the scholarly literature employing the IRR (Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction model) formulated by this paper’s author (published in World Development in October 1997, which since has become the leading model in the international research on DFDR). Based on these data we proposes a range of solutions: specifically tailored counter-risk strategies; pragmatic operational approaches; and legal frameworks necessary to address the identified risks and thus build-up and increase the social sustainability of forthcoming infrastructure projects.