

**THE IMPACT OF PLANNING AND  
IMPLEMENTATION OF MEGA PROJECTS  
ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF  
PROJECT-AFFECTED PERSONS: A CASE  
STUDY OF THE DIAMER-BHASHA DAM IN  
PAKISTAN**

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**ASIA e UNIVERSITY  
2025**

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ALI AKBAR

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## ABSTRACT

Mega development projects such as dams, highways, and urban infrastructure schemes are often considered as the foundation of national progress, helping in energy generation, economic growth, and modernization. However, the implementation of mega projects comes at the cost of the forced displacement of thousands of households, whose socio-economic well-being and cultural identity are greatly disrupted. This study investigates these disruptions by examining the case of the Diamer Bhasha Dam (DBD) in Pakistan. Diamer Bhasha Dam has displaced over 35,000 people, submerged approximately 40 villages, and affected the livelihoods of communities dependent on agriculture, mining, and trade. Taking into consideration these conditions, the research addresses a critical question: how do planning and implementation deficiencies in mega projects shape the socio-economic mobility and resilience of displaced populations, and what lessons can be drawn for future mega infrastructure development projects? The research identifies a gap in both academic literature and policy practices. Methodologically, the research employs a quantitative case study design complemented by qualitative stakeholder consultations. The main findings of the study show considerable deterioration in the socio-economic status of the displaced people. In addition, the project has affected decision-making (governance and leadership). The study has a number of important policy implications for the future planners of mega projects.

**Keywords:** Mega projects, development-induced displacement, socio-economic status, resettlement, livelihood restoration, Diamer Bhasha dam

## **APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The student has been supervised by: **Prof Dato' Dr Sayed Mushtaq Hussain**

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**Professor Dr Siow Heng Loke**  
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Chairperson, Examination Committee  
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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**Date:** 29 July 2025



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CSR	Compulsory Acquisition Surcharge
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DIU	Dam Implementation Unit
FA	Faculty of Arts
FSc	Faculty of Science
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IVS	Independent Valuation Study
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LAA	Land Acquisition Act
MA	Master of Arts
MSc	Master of Science
PAPs	Project Affected Persons
PKR	Pakistani Rupee
SSC	Secondary School Certificate

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.0 Background of Study**

Large-scale infrastructure projects are often promoted as catalysts for national economic growth, improved services, and long-term development. However, their success is not solely determined by engineering excellence or financial investment; rather, it hinges on the quality of planning and implementation, especially when such projects require the displacement of communities. Inadequate planning, poor stakeholder engagement, delays in compensation, and insufficient livelihood restoration measures can lead to serious and long-lasting socio-economic hardships for those directly affected.

In the context of project-induced displacement, the socio-economic status of Project-Affected Persons (PAPs) is highly sensitive to how resettlement and rehabilitation are managed. Effective planning can ensure that PAPs receive timely, fair compensation, access to essential services, and opportunities to rebuild or improve their livelihoods. Conversely, weak planning and fragmented implementation often result in loss of income, deterioration in living standards, erosion of social networks, and increased vulnerability. These outcomes are not inevitable; they are the direct consequence of managerial decisions made during the life cycle of a project.

The Diamer Bhasha Dam (DBD) in Pakistan is a prime example of how such challenges unfold. The project, while expected to deliver significant national benefits in terms of water storage, energy generation, and flood control, requires the relocation of thousands of households from 34 villages. This creates complex resettlement demands, making it essential to investigate how planning and

implementation processes influence the well-being of the displaced population. The lessons learned from this project have the potential to guide future large-scale developments towards more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

Only after considering these issues can the concept of a “mega project” be properly contextualized. Mega projects are generally defined as large, complex ventures, typically costing billions of dollars, involving multiple stakeholders, taking many years to complete, and producing transformative Impact at local, regional, and national levels. While they promise broad benefits such as improved infrastructure, increased economic activity, and enhanced public services, they also carry substantial risk, particularly for those whose homes, land, and livelihoods are sacrificed in the name of development.

All successful mega projects provide services to the people and if the project could not provide benefits to the people, such projects are failed projects. Most of the projects failed because of ill planning and mismanagement, which create further problems for human society (Othman, & Ahmed, 2013). The failure and successes of the mega projects have both positive and negative effects and in case of failure, it costs millions of dollars without achieving a good result for human society. Financial loss is one of the losses as it could cause several other negative Impact including degradation of the environment. Failure of the mega projects also discourages tremendous future investment in the mega projects.

Any mismanagement of the mega projects can create socio-economic and environmental problems in different parts of the world. The policy makers and planners most often ignored the basic principles of sustainable development before the initiation of developmental projects. Therefore, the unequitable benefits of developmental projects for different stakeholders create socio-economic and political

issues in different parts of the world (Gellert, & Lynch, 2003). The socio-economic development of the Project-Affected Persons (PAPs) was often neglected in the developmental projects, which affected their socio-economic status.

The PAPs loss their assets and sources of income and are forcefully displaced from their native towns due to the execution of mega projects. Mega projects or large-scale developmental projects require land which most often is the sole source of income for the dislocated people. Along with the displacement, the mega projects have also a great impact on the livelihoods of the people in the surrounding Area of Influence (AOI) (Levitt, & Scott, 2017). It also affects the local physical-cultural resources, social environment, and social fabric of the displaced population. However, the management of the various mega projects adopted the conventional resettlement practices, which simply focus financial aspects of the resettlement. It has only confined the conventional resettlement practice to providing cash as compensation (El-Sabek, & McCabe, 2018). The management of the mega projects often ignores the different problems of the displaced population. It creates many hardships for the local people. It causes both socio-economic and psychological issues for the resettlers.

Therefore, resettlement is a complex and multi-dimensional process, and various factors are involved in its process at different levels. Mega projects displaced a huge number of people, especially hydropower projects. For instance, in Pakistan, Tarbela Dam displaced thousands of people and it was one of the mega hydro power projects. Tarbela Dam is the largest dam situated in the northern part of Pakistan which was completed in the year 1976. The dam was constructed on the river Indus which displaced a vast population of district Swabi and Haripur of the Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa province (Hashim Hanif et al., 2016). After 40 years of its completion, still, the people who had been displaced could not properly be resettled.

The Mangla Dam was also constructed in Azad Kashmir situated in the administrative control of Pakistan. It is the largest dam and displaced many people from their hometowns. This dam created various social and economic problems for the displaced population and still, they are facing social and financial problems. The majority of the displaced population lost their resources and their social status. It is also observed that at the global level the displaced population has little chance of upward mobility (Ullah, Raza, & Mirza, 2019).

The problems that arise as a result of mega projects cause various political issues. It also arises conflict among the different stakeholders. Dam projects required a vast area which created not only livelihood problems for the PAPs but also factions and feuds. Dams sometimes bring changes in the routes of which not only cause floods but also affect the livelihood of the people. For example, sand mining, fishing, and other natural resources bring them their livelihood. Along with the economic problems, the displaced population also lost their indigenous cultural capital. However, the management or executing agencies on several occasions ignored the PAPs and their surrounding neighbors in the benefits of the dam. The elite class benefits mostly from the mega projects and displaced population rights have been violated, (Drouin, 2021). The displaced population lost trust in the project administration.

It is the responsibility of the project manager to take into account all the stakeholders and start consultative meetings with the displaced population to minimize the negative social and economic effects of the mega projects. However, the displaced population is not taken into confidence and their rights have been

violated. The mega projects are often imposed on the native people by force. Avoiding the use of force and protecting the rights of the displaced population create a favorable situation to initiate the mega projects. Adopting the conventional approach and possession of land and other assets of the PAPs would create not only social issues but also cause political polarization over the mega projects.

Political polarization over the mega project can be reduced through negotiation with the displaced population. The projects should be designed in a way to protect the rights of the PAPs and compensates them according to the guidelines of the donor agencies. In all stages of the mega projects, the PAPs should be taken into confidence to avoid political polarization and develop consensus over the mega projects. Transparency in financial compensation to PAPs makes the mega projects successful. These steps can protect the mega projects from controversies and will help the policy makers to get political support for the projects. The mega projects' negative impact on the local population should be properly evaluated to decrease their effects on the PAPs.

However, some people may benefit from being resettled, and others loss the things they valued such as losing land and their socio-physical environment. PAPs resettlement is considered a project within projects because it is one of the challenging tasks. Resettlement is considered complex and difficult and it requires proper planning. Along negative effects of the mega projects are unavoidable and without mega projects, we cannot achieve the aim of national development wherein, displacement is considered collateral damage. However, for economic development, the planners and execution agencies often violate the basic human rights of the displaced population. As compared to developed counties the mega projects in poor counties have more negative effects on the displaced population. It is difficult for the

displaced population to find alternative means of livelihood. They loss their socioeconomic status in this situation.

In developing countries particularly, those ruled by the British umpire follow the land Acquisition Act of 1894. The LAA-1894 allows compensation against the affected land, trees (both fruit and forest), and built-up properties while the same Act is silent on the allowances and other benefits meant for the PAPs to help them in their resettlement and rehabilitation. The legal framework to protect the rights of the PAPs is not properly applicable across developing countries which ultimately bring hardships for the PAPs to get resettled in a new location. The violation of their basic rights in mega projects reverse their economic condition and tear-up their social fabric (El-Sabek, & McCabe, 2018). They lost their resources which cannot allow them to strengthen their socio-economic status. Within the legal framework and as defined in the LAA-1894 in mega projects the PAPs are often compensated against their affected land based on the preceding one-year average value of the notification of section 4. The built-up properties are compensated based on the Market Rate System (MRS) by the C&W department in Pakistan which is also based on the MRS of the preceding year of section-4 notification.

Though the international donors are open regarding compensation (allowances) to bring ease to the resettlement and rehabilitation of the PAPs. As a result, the displaced population becomes more marginalized after the initiation of the mega projects. The government does not pay them according to international standards and more often their land and other assets are taken into possession against their well. In many cases, these rights and standards do not guarantee the mega projects initiated by the developing countries. It is believed that following the international standard of resettlement could help us avoid the adverse effects of mega projects. Almost all

mega projects may have land acquisition requirements. It is important to design a comprehensive plan for the resettlement of the displaced population to control the social and environmental problems and as well as protect the rights of the PAPs. Resettlement and rehabilitation issues of the PAPs are faced both in developed and developing countries (Kennedy, 2015). In developing countries, the PAPs are poor and they depend on their meager resources. In developing countries, PAPs face more severe socio-economic problems after the initiation of developmental projects (Gellert, & Lynch, 2003). Developing countries often cannot design a project to consider all the socio-political aspects related to developmental projects and they do not follow the international standards in true spirit. The developmental projects are often initiated without considering the needs of the PAPs. Resultantly, it creates political and social polarization and makes developmental projects controversial in developing countries. For instance, in Pakistan, various developmental projects are still controversial and some of the political parties resisted the Kala Bagh dam project due to its devastating effects on the PAPs (Bansal, 2013).

In developing countries like Pakistan, most of the projects were initiated without taking into confidence the local community, and as result, the mega developmental Projects negatively affected the people and they face problems (Ejaz, Hussain, Shabbir, Shamim, Naeem, Tahir, & Farooq, 2013). The local and native people who lost land and resources were often ignored in the royalties and other benefits of the projects which ultimately triggered anger among them. The socio-economic, cultural, environmental degradation, health, and educational problems of the re-settlers are partially or fully ignored during resettlement and rehabilitation, especially in Pakistan (as discussed above). State's policies partially cover the economic and environmental part of the resettlement while ignoring the social and proper

rehabilitation of re-settlers. The local affected population has a strong emotional connection with their hometown and the policy makers ignore their attachment to their local town (Schwalbe, 2009). while ignoring the long-term negative social Impact of the developmental projects the project planners often focus on the economic needs and give compensation amounts to PAPs, the internal displacement also affects the host communities and it creates a problem for them (Black, 2018).

Conflicts arise between the host and the displaced population. (Vanclay, F. (2020). The local population does not recognize the project affectees in their hometown. Often the PAPs are not taken into confidence and sometimes they are forcibly displaced from their hometown. Forced dislocation of the PAPs is always a challenging job for the government and executing agencies, as many of the PAPs resist to leaving from their ancestral place of living. The project planners and execution body face ethical questions on different developmental projects and few (haves) of the affected population are getting benefits from the mega projects (Rogers, & Wilmsen, 2021). Large infrastructure projects of new dams, transmission lines, highways, industries, irrigation, or urban developments such as hospitals, schools, airports, and satellite towns forcefully displaced the lower middle or lower-class people from their native towns. It causes economic problems for PAPs and affects their socioeconomic status in society.

The state uses power to dislocate the native population which is a gross violation of their rights. This raises major issues of social justice and equity. The state often picks up the principle of “Compare the greatest happiness for the greatest number” to facilitate the displaced people and provide economic opportunity to them. However, in most of the projects, the outcome is unjustifiable wherein; some people are the gainers while others are losers in the development. We often measure