

Andhra CM Ignoring Rehabilitating the people about to be Displaced by Polavaram Project

While 298 villages run the risk of being submerged, whose interests is the Government really watering?

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Time and again Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has been making statements about finishing the Polavaram Project before 2019 general elections. But not once has he mentioned anything about the rehabilitation planning for the 'about to be displaced' people.

The construction of Polavaram Irrigation Project on river Godavari is underway in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The multi-purpose project is expected to facilitate irrigation to 2.91 lakh hectares of land and generate 960 MW of electricity. But once the dam reaches its full capacity, 298 villages will be submerged, leading to the massive displacement of more than 3 lakh people, 50 % of them being Adivasis belonging to Koya and Kondareddy communities. And nearly 30% of the remaining belong to Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes. This displacement is equivalent to that caused by Sardar Sarovar Dam over Narmada river.

In August, Andhra Pradesh Government officials submitted the revised estimated cost of the project which is 58, 319.06 crores to the Central Government. So far, RS 1981.54 crores were sanctioned by the centre. According to 2010 -11 estimates, the project cost was 16010.45 crore.

Rehabilitation process:

Vexed with agitations, for years, the people have been opposing the construction of the dam in order to protect their cultural presence. The ones who will be affected by the dam, are now demanding a just rehabilitation process. They have formed an organization, “Polavaram Nirvasitula Sangham” and is collectively leading their struggles against the hurdles they are encountering in the rehabilitation process. They are demanding proper implementation of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013.

The project came up in the year 2004 and was initiated by the then Chief Minister late Y S Rajashekar Reddy. Construction process began without obtaining basic requisite statutory clearances like site clearance, R&R clearance, environment clearance, forest clearance, investment clearance and tribal welfare clearance. There were allegations that the political push behind the project was not just meant for watering fields, but also for the water requirements of a “coastal corridor” running

along the State's entire coast as well as many other water-guzzling multi-product special economic zones.

The project got national status (the central government will bear the full cost) by the UPA II government through the AP Reorganization Act, 2014. Through the same act, seven - Kunavaram, VR Puram, Chintoor, Nellipaka, Veleirpad, Burgumpahad and Kukkunoor, which historically part of Hyderabad state (Telangana Region) and came under Schedule five region, were transferred to the newly formed Andhra Pradesh state, only to ease the construction of the Polavaram Project.

This July, the Telangana government has filed a counter affidavit in a case related to Polavaram project in Supreme Court. It requested the Court to direct the Government of Andhra Pradesh, to carry out fresh environmental impact assessment (EIA) study for extending the environmental clearance for the project. Cases filed by Chhattisgarh and Odisha governments to halt the Polavaram Project are also pending in the Supreme Court.

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