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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, DAMS AND DISPLACEMENT IN SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA REGION, TURKEY

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Abstract

This study is about the social impacts of Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP in Turkish). The aim of this study is to unveil the contradictory nature of development-progress ideology which justifies the big projects and ignore social and environmental impacts of these projects. The main objectives of this study to analyze the impacts of GAP project on local people and get the answer of the question of environmental justice that is, who pay the cost and who reap the benefits? This study has found that though GAP stands as a regional development project, GAP so far could not achieve its target. Due to some structural characteristics of region, Mostly big landlords of this region are getting socio-economic benefits from the development brought by GAP. However, adverse impacts have fallen on the landless and small landholders. This study has also found that the adverse effects of the project are locally concentrated but the remarkable gains are being achieved at the national level.

Keywords: GAP, Dams, Displacement, Environmental Justice, Turkey.

1. Introduction

There is explicit or implicit assumption behind all development policies that the model of 'the good life' is prevailing in the rich societies of the North. The question that how to attain this 'good life' by the poor people of north and south, peasants and women all around the world, is usually answered in terms of what, since Rostow, can be called the 'catching-up development' path. This means that those who aspire to achieve 'the good life' must follow the path of industrialization, technological progress and capital accumulation taken by North (Mies 1993). This concept of development undermines the cultural diversity of distinct societies as well as the complexity of their social systems. This concept also disregards the fact that the level of acceptance of any development project highly depend on the people who are subject to it.

Large water development projects may offer significant benefits. However, these projects are not without their problems, as aside from their benefits for the population, projects can also affect communities adversely. Their benefits have been over exaggerated and their social and ecological costs were grossly underestimated. The World Commission on Dams (WCD) has provided statistical backup for this position. The WCD (2000) found that dams have on average fail to reach their promised targets. Dams cause livelihood insecurity for the 'ecosystem people'. Indigenous people, tribal and peasant communities have been particularly very badly affected. The GAP is designed to harness the waters of Tigris and Euphrates rivers with the construction of 22 dams and 19 Hydroelectric Power Plants (HEPP). Aygüney (2002) argues that "The objectives of GAP and the activities carried out within the project stand as applications of the 'catching-up' theory at a smaller scale, giving the western regions of Turkey a higher status on the path to development while defining Southeast Anatolia as 'underdeveloped'. It has been one of the greatest attempts of the project to make the region catch-up with western Turkey." Hence, there is an assumption that this region can be developed and the living conditions of people can be improved by following the developed western region of Turkey.

GAP is being implemented as an integrated regional development project based on sustainable human development focusing on competitive power and economic and social integration. This project is planned to develop the socio-economic condition and cultural aspects of Turkey including human-focused, innovative and sustainable projects and programs that are intended to reduce income disparities, gives priority to groups and area that are disadvantaged. The projects and programs in the Action Plan are geared to accelerating regional development, creating employment, protecting natural resources, the environment and cultural properties,

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upholding technological advances and completing projects in irrigation, transportation and industrial infrastructure (Action Plan 2014).

GAP stands as a “regional development project”. However, it is not providing sustainable future for the soil and local people. It has not only destructed the local livelihoods but also caused the deterioration of soil through salinization. The adverse effects of the project are locally concentrated but the remarkable gains are being achieved at the national level (Aygüney 2002). The aim of this study is to unveil the contradictory nature of development-progress ideology which justifies the big projects and ignore social and environmental impacts of these projects. The main objectives of this study to analyze the impacts of GAP project on local people and get the answer of the question of environmental justice that is, who pay the cast and who reap the benefits? In the coming sections, this paper will illuminate the concept of environmental justice; give details about the GAP region and its social structure; provide the current development status of hydropower and water resources in the GAP, and impacts of GAP on local population.

2. Development Projects and Environmental Justice

There is a large literature that argues that the mega projects such as Dams cause livelihood insecurity for the ‘ecosystem people’. It is argued that those who pay the greatest cost of large dam construction tend to be poor, marginalized and vulnerable members of society (Wood 2007). By contrast, their beneficiaries tend to be people who are already well-off. In an action guide for communities affected by dam published by International Rivers Network states that:

Factories and city residents benefit from power generated or water stored by dams. Large agricultural companies benefit from cheap water for irrigation. Dams often take resources away from rural communities to give these benefits to industries and people living in cities. Sometimes these industries and people are in neighboring countries. Construction and engineering companies benefit too. They receive millions of dollars for designing and building dams. Governments can benefit from taxes collected during construction or operation of a dam. Because of the large amounts of money spent on dams, corrupt government or company officials sometimes take money for their own benefit. The ones who have suffered most from large dams are rural farmers and indigenous or tribal peoples. Millions of people have been evicted from their homes to make way for dams and reservoirs. Millions more living downstream have lost resources and their traditional livelihoods. To make matters worse, dam-affected people are rarely included in decisions about whether or not to build a dam. They usually do not know their rights to information and public hearings, to demand new land and livelihoods, and even to oppose dams. They typically do not receive benefits of electricity or water although they may live right next to a dam (IRN 2006: 4).

WCD (2000) report reveals that “the poor, vulnerable groups and future generations are likely to bear a disproportionate share of the social and environmental costs of large dam projects without gaining a commensurate share of the economic benefits”. Mega projects having brought benefits to the creamy layer of the population, threaten the livelihood of the ecosystem people who subsist on land, water and forest. Forcedly displacement of people from the areas where they live, grow crops, fish and raise livestock make most people poorer. They face problems getting enough food to eat and money to support their families (IRN 2006). Hence, They are facing environmental injustice.

Environmental Injustice occurs when some communities disproportionately bear environmental burdens, or have not equal access to environmental benefits, or have less opportunity in environmental decision-making process (Shrader-Frechette 2002). At the heart of environmental justice agenda are the question that who pay the cost and who get benefits from development projects and economic growth. The principles of Environmental Justice outline three major concepts of EJ: no community should bear a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards, all communities should have access to environmental benefits, and decision-making processes need to be transparent and include community voices (Vanderwarker 2012). Kuehn (2000) argued that in order to avoid environmental justice, development agents whether government officials or private actors, must address ‘the distributive, procedural, corrective, and social justice aspects’ of their development activities. Distributive justice entails fair distribution of the costs and benefits of natural resource exploitation among and within nation; Procedural justice calls for open, informed and inclusive decision-making processes. Corrective justice calls for an obligation to compensate for historic injustice and inequity and to avoid repeating the harmful conduct (Mickelson 2009), and Social justice demands that environmental struggles are inextricably intertwined with struggles for social and economic justice (Gonzalez 2011). Many environmental justice

struggles in the global South have been spearheaded by local and indigenous communities in opposition to development projects that threaten their lands, livelihoods, and natural resources (Guha 2000; Gonzalez 2013).

3. The Southeast Anatolia Region (*Güney Anadolu Bölgesi, in Turkish*)

The Southeast Anatolia geographical region is well characterized by the uniformity of the landscape and the two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris. They both originate in the mountains of Turkey. The Euphrates, 2,990 kilometers Long River, flows first through Syria and then Iraq. The Tigris, 1,900 kilometers long, flows directly to Iraq. The two rivers meet at the Persian Gulf, at a point called Shatt-El-Arab. The land in between the rivers is called Mesopotamia recognized as the 'fertile crescent' due to its high fertility and shape.

Unlike most of Turkey, the Southeastern Anatolian Region has a semi-arid continental climate with very high temperatures and low precipitation in the summer and very low temperatures in the winter with occasional snow fall. The project area contains nine administrative provinces in the basins of the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers, (Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Sanlıurfa and Şırnak). The GAP Region covers a surface area of 75,358 km², which corresponds to 9.7 % of the total surface area of Turkey. The population of the GAP region is 8.39 million, which corresponds to 10.6 % of the total population of the country 78.74 million (GAPRDA 2016).

3.1 Social Fabric of Southeast Anatolia Region

Within the Southeast Anatolia, there are many sub-regions having different mixture of social distinct groups. The social structure and land tenure system of this ethnically mixed region are different from the other regions of country. The social structure of Southeast Anatolia Region is still mainly feudalistic. Important social features include patriarchy, traditional leadership structures, and semi-nomadic heritage, making the region different to the rest of the country.

One of the most important socio-economic problems of the region is the unequal distribution of lands which can be seen in the management and ownership of the cultivable land of the region. The feature of disproportionate distribution of land has become the synonymous with this region. People who are engaged in agriculture are either landless or landowners. Among the landowners, some people own small tracts of lands; whereas, others (large tribal families) own large tracts of lands. The ruling tribal-cum-landlord families those were nomadic some two centuries ago used their social position to obtain exclusive rights to land, and the ordinary members of the community became landless tenants or sharecroppers (Kudat and Bayram, 2000). In a study carried out in the irrigated lands of the plains of Şanlıurfa-Harran revealed that 59% of the households did not possess any land and those households who possess lands, 67% of them have less than 5 ha. However, only 2.5% households own more than 20 ha (Ökten 2006). Carkoglu and Eder (2001) found that 10 percent of the population own ¾ percent of lands; whereas, nearly 3/5 percent of the farmers (approximately 150,000 families) have less than 5 ha land. Similarly, Unver (1997) suggest that on average 37% of the farmers are landless; 43% own between 1 and 5 ha; and 4.3% own more than 20 ha. The unequal distribution of lands has resulted in the unequal control of the lands. Less than half of the families (45.1%) cultivate their own lands and 7.2% of the households cultivate the lands of their family. The remaining 47.8% of land is being cultivated by either tenants (15.4%) or sharecropper (32.4%). These types of farming stemming from the land ownership develop social dependency relations among people (Ökten 2006).

Another essential feature that distinguishes the region from other traditional regions is the tribal ties. A large part of the communities living in the region associate themselves with these tribes. The individuals relate themselves firstly with a clan and then as a member of the tribe. In a study (Ökten 2004) 81.3% of households expressed their association with tribes. The tribal ties being functional in many fields provide safety to the people. However, the tribal loyalty also bring with it certain obligations that determine where to get married and to which party to vote and so on.

4. The Impacts of Southeast Anatolia Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi (GAP)*)

The Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) was initially undertaken as a development plan to exploit water and land resources of the region and consequently planned as a package comprising 13 projects envisaging irrigation schemes and hydraulic power plants in the basins of the Euphrates and the Tigris. As a whole this water resources development programme includes the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric plants on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in South-eastern Turkey. The GAP project has greatly fostered economic growth within overall Turkey due to increased agricultural output and an increase in the overall power production capacity of this fast growing country. Until the end of 2015, 416.2 billion kilowatt-hours of electrical energy has been produced in the region, and the monetary value of energy produced is 25 billion USD (GAPRDA 2016).

Though GAP stands as a “regional development project”, GAP so far could not achieve its target. Due to some structural characteristics of region, Mostly big landlords of this region are getting socio-economic benefits from the development brought by GAP. whereas, its adverse impacts have fallen on the landless and small landholders (Aygüney 2002). Kudat and Bayram (2000) suggested that the landowners are getting the absolute benefits directly and he also showed how unequal distribution of land causes the unequal distribution of income. They stated that those having large tracts of lands have been benefited the most in absolute terms. This in turn has ensured their political clout and power along with their capability to invest in manufacturing and trade. In the similar study they found that:

The farmers themselves are less enthusiastic about changes in living conditions. When asked how GAP had changed their lives, 53 percent of the sharecroppers and 43 percent of landowners indicated no change. Only 20 percent of the landless stated that they could more easily find jobs, and 26 percent of the landowners said they had higher incomes. Even in villages where irrigation, land consolidation, and leveling have been completed, only 29 percent of landowners indicated higher incomes (Kudat and Bayram 2000: 267). Far from improving the well-being of disadvantaged and vulnerable population, GAP project has caused problems for significant numbers of people displaced following the construction of dams (Kurt 2013) Bearing all the costs of the changes in both their biophysical and social environments, if local people are not ‘developing’, it is then worth questioning for whom GAP has been put forward (Aygüney 2002). This study focuses on the issue of environmental justice by evaluating the existing literature and intends to see whether this project is fulfilling its promise of sustainable human development as claimed in Action Plan 2014.

5. Impacts of GAP on Displacees

General consensus has been found among development agents that development induced displacement causes serious disruption and losses for the people and communities (Dwivedi 1999; WCD 2000). The key issues are those of socio-economic impoverishment, human rights, citizen entitlements and the relationships between them. Adverse effects of displacement typically include the loss of livelihoods, loss of land rights and housing and loss of social networks. It is also recognized that disadvantaged people and communities bear the disproportionate burden of these negative effects.

The GAP project, despite aiming to achieve “sustainable human development”, is not sustainable human development. Forced displacement of the people and inappropriate resettlements has caused the problem. So far, more than 350,000 people in Southeast Anatolia have been displaced by the GAP project. Eviction on this scale causes deep economic and cultural disruption for the individuals affected, as well as to the social fabric of local communities. With the help of existing research and literature, the condition of resettled people of Ataturk Dam and Birecik dam would be analysed.

5.1. Resettlement of Ataturk Dam Displacees

Ataturk Dam, the part of the GAP project’s development, has adverse impacts on a huge area and large number of people. Displacement has been an issue since the completion of the Ataturk dam in the 1990s, where the majority of people who were displaced were not resettled properly There are displacees of Atatürk Dam who are still living in temporary resettlements and cannot make future plans (Akyürek 2005). Compensation has usually been tied to the property of land or houses in the Southeast Anatolia region. Since most land in this region is concentrated in the hands of tiny minority of big landlords, many landless families were totally deprived of compensation (Rivernet undated). This indicates that displacees of Aaturk dam has disproportionately borne the burden of the development; however when it came to benefits of dam, they have been deprived of the benefits resulting from the Ataturk dam. Besides that, they have not been properly compensated for their losses.

5.2. Resettlement of Birecik Dam Displacees

The Birecik Hydroelectric dam is part of the GAP project’s development and is located on the Euphrates River, 96 km downstream from the Ataturk Dam. After the problems escalated within the Ataturk Dam resettlement scheme, the Turkish Government decided to pursue a different strategy for resettling those affected by the Birecik Dam. The Resettlement Law was revised, a resettlement plan was prepared and efforts were made to encourage people to resettle with government help (Kurt 2013). Learning from past experiences, careful consideration was given to the resettlement procedure for the Birecik dam. This case was considered by the Turkish authorities to have been successful in terms of resettlement and compensation. Due to the construction of Birecik dam, nearly 30,000 people were affected, of whom 6,500 people were resettled. Miyata (2004) conducted a research to know the perception of people with respect to living condition before and after resettlement. He found that one third of villagers were unhappy with the resettlement and perceived the

resettlement condition worse. there is an increase in the employment raising from 0 percent to 14.5 percent. People used to have multiple jobs now more than 70 percent people have to rely on either one job or no job.

Kurt (2013) conducted a research on resettlers' livelihoods after the resettlement in Halfeti area. He observed difference households responded differently to the building of the dam. He identified three categories from the household sample, based on their levels of well-being, i.e, the better-off, middle-income and poorer households. Unlike the middle-income or better-off households, poor households lack skills or suffer from poor health. In comparison with better-off and middle-income households, poorer households have no freedom of choice and most can only find temporary low-paid work, which does not allow them to make any livelihood choices in terms of diversification or investment in long term plans. Poorer households lack the required capabilities and this restricts their freedom in terms of decision-making. Therefore, Kurt (2013) argues that the building of the dam has had different impacts on different households. Whereas better-off households are more resilient to vulnerability, poorer households were observed as being more vulnerable to poverty, because they have few assets and lack the capability to combine these assets to make a sustainable living.

Despite the efforts of Turkish Government to improve resettlements, displacees are not happy in their resettlement areas. These studies concerning Birecik dam reveal the discontent of displacees in terms of compensation procedure, poor dwelling. After relocation, their income generation has been reduced and unemployment is on the rise. Hence, Environmental injustice occur to them as they have neither gained benefits of dam nor have been properly compensated for their losses. They were dissatisfied concerning to public participation in this dam and found it to be inadequate. This study suggests that Public participation is critical to achieving environmental justice. Environmental justice challenges the exclusive nature of environmental decision-making and argues that in order to avoid Environmental injustice, the effective and meaningful participation of potentially impacted communities should be involved in decision-making process.

6. Public Participation and Environmental Justice

Indigenous people are accorded International right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). This right gives them opportunity to take part in decisions which affect their lands and source of livelihoods. It also entitles them to halt unwanted development project by refusing consent. The WCD report states that the people who are going to be affected by a dam project "have the greatest stakes in the decisions that are taken". The WCD report presented the core values that should guide any process of decision-making regarding a proposed dam. These core values are "equity, efficiency, participatory decision- making, sustainability, and accountability". These values "form the foundation of a rights-based approach to equitable decision-making about water and energy resources management". Furthermore, it recommended that upholding the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), as a standard to be applied in addressing indigenous peoples' rights in the development process. The projects which affect indigenous people are guided by their free, prior and informed consent, whose violation would compromise equity, sustainability and the development effectiveness of proposed projects.

One of the main development policies in the literature of GAP project was "Participation of local people" at different stages of the project including planning, implementation monitoring and evaluation. However, Kudat and Bayram (2000) state that there are no investigation or documentation on to what extent this development policy has been accomplished. In a study, conducted by(Ökten 2004) revealed that nearly 4/5 of the families (76.8%) stated that they did not have any participation in this project.

7. Results and Recommendations

This study has found that though GAP stands as a regional development project, GAP so far could not achieve its target. Due to some structural characteristics of region, Mostly big landlords of this region are getting socio-economic benefits from the development brought by GAP. This study has found that the unequal distribution of lands in this region is a big obstacle in the process of development among the people who are associated with agriculture. It is suggested that the land reforms are prerequisite before running any development project, and these land reforms should be done in a way that big land lords may not evade the reforms process.

GAP stands as a "regional development project" and was supposed to eradicate inequality and disenfranchisement by providing an economic fix to these social problems. However, Far from improving the well-being of disadvantaged and vulnerable population and eradicating inequality in this region, GAP project has caused problems for significant numbers of people who were displaced and not resettled properly. They were also deprived of genuine public participation. Hence, Environmental injustice has befallen on the disadvantaged people who have neither got chance to take part in decision making process nor got promised

benefits and appropriate compensation so far. A development project should bring the positive socio-economic changes in local people rather than pushing them poverty. Therefore, It is suggested that those who have paid the cost of this development project should be compensated properly.

This study highly recommends that Public participation is critical to achieving environmental justice. The effective and meaningful participation of potentially impacted communities should be involved in decision-making process. The projects which affect indigenous people are guided by their free, prior and informed consent. That could be done through holding community referendum which provides accurate information about the local voters' wish and their position on the project. The right to FPIC is certainly not fulfilled or upheld merely by the conducting community referendum. It depends on whether the concerned government acts in accordance with the outcome of the election. When a government proceeds with the project without considering the discontent of people shown in election, it violates the right to free, prior, and informed consent.

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