

Sardar Sarovar Project - A Summary

Why in news?

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The Sardar Sarovar Dam was recently dedicated to the nation.

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How has the project evolved?

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- A small dam of 49.37m height was planned across Narmada in 1956 - but the project was subsequently dropped.

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- The Sardar Sarovar Project was proposed in 1979, that envisioned a massive 138.68m dam.

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- The project ran into controversy due to the enormous negative impact on communities and the ecosystem.

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- While the barrier wall of the dam has just been declared open, only 33% of the project canals in Gujarat have been completed till now.

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What are the controversies?

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- **Impact** - Full reservoir capacity will cover 40,000 hectare and hence expels 244 villages and one township.

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- About 10 lakh people involved in diverse economic activities would have to be displaced.

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- Vast tracts of forest stare submergence.

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- Prime agriculture land and at least a few thousand cattle in each village will be lost.
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- **NBA** - “Narmada Bachao Andolan” an NGO started an intense campaign against it.
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- It elaborately documented the economic damages and the plight of the displaced.
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- Its research on the environment & ecological implications of the project even won the applause of the apex court.
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- **Court Rulings** - While the project wasn't stayed, Supreme court passed orders to address the grievances of the displaced.
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- A Grievance Redressal Authority (GRA) was set up to receive complaints and pass directions to the state authority.
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- Those entitled to land were sanctioned Rs.60 lakh compensation.
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- SC also directed that all amenities, mandatory under law, should be in place at resettlement sites by June 2017 - an enormous task.
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What is the plight of these being displaced?

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- While the state & the GRA have defaulted considerably in facilitating smooth migration.
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- Many of those eligible for compensation have not received them, but are facing pressure to shifting immediately nevertheless.
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- Rehabilitation sites are also not ready — they do not have drinking water supply, drainage facilities and cattle grazing lands.
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- They currently suffer harassment by the police and other government machinery.
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How can the future be better planned?

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- Development of power plants, dams or government townships will all considerably contribute to the economy.

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- But the larger question that needs evaluation is that whether it is worth the socio-economic and ecological losses that it might cause.

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- In almost every major developmental project, there is little concern for compensation and mitigation like in Narmada's case.

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- Evolving systems for ensuring better rehabilitation is a prerequisite if the fruits of development is to be shared equitably.

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Source: The Hindu

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