



By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

Mega Projects and Mega Infrastructure in Goa: Who is Coming in the Way of Whom?

The immediate trigger for this article is an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Report for the proposed modernization and expansion of port infrastructure, supposedly for fishing, coastal, multipurpose cargo berth and liquid/general cargo at Mormugao Port, Goa, which has been prepared for Mormugao Port Trust, a body corporate under the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963, by Ultratech Environmental Consultancy and Laboratory.

The takeover of the commons, including beaches and seashores and river shores, is being so normalized that the Environmental Consultants who have prepared the Report openly admit to it in the draft report that the MPT needs to get a fish landing platform out of the way because it is occupying prominent waterfront area close to the berth making development of port infrastructure difficult. The Report further asserts the importance of the need of MPT to cater to the ever-increasing trade demands, which cannot be done because this fishing platform is coming in the way. And, as if as a sop, there is a proposal to construct a new fishing jetty, but even that is combined with five other projects. The construction of the fishing jetty is clearly a cover for the five other projects, such as the development of berth for liquid bulk, and other general cargo, development of multipurpose cargo berth, among others. It is also a reinforcement to the previous proposed projects such as a coal hub, which as participants at the public hearing on the Coal Hub last April reiterated again and again, would have the effect of literally sweeping Goans off their feet, in the most negative ways imaginable. Moreover the location of the proposed fishing jetty at the Vasco bay makes the fisherpeople vulnerable.

This is nothing but raw and undisguised corporate-centric politics. It suggests that fishing community and other people who have traditionally or as migrants earned or derived their livelihoods for ages from the coastal belt, and that too in a sustainable way, are dispensable. It seems to be saying, like Eliza Doolittle in the movie 'My Fair Lady', "And without much ado, we can all muddle through without you".

The goalposts are moved. The lens is turned around. And Goa's first people and Goa's marginalized people are projected as coming in the way of development. This has been a

phenomenon that has been trending for some time from the State. In 2002, the people rejected Miramar Beach Privatization, where the beach was sought to be privatized, and Mega Projects and Mega Infrastructure in Goa: Who is Coming in the Way of Whom? fisherpeople and traditional communities were going to be denied their use of the beach commons. Mercifully, the One-Man Commission set up by the Government, in the form of Dr. Nandkumar Kamat shot the proposal down after hearing various stakeholders.

The Report of this Commission observed that a firm settlement of fisherpeople must have come up from Campal to Caranzalem as long ago as the Kadamba period. Further the Report has in fact considered the fishing community as the traditional trustees of the beach. "The diversity of the fisheries resources and its sustainable utilisation are underestimated in the Miramar Beach Management Plan. Fishermen are afraid of interference. Poor people depend on the large amount of driftwood swept by the floods on the beach during the monsoon," the Report thundered. And yet, these people who have sustainably used the natural resources are considered as hindrances to development. Time and again, the question needs to be reiterated: Development for Whom and at Whose Cost?

Once again, the Revised City Development Plan 2041 of the Corporation of the City of Panjim has acknowledged that the khazan lands are saline flood plains in Goa's tidal estuaries which are community managed, integrated agro-fishery-saltpan ecosystems, but there appears to be no real plan envisaged for their sustenance WITH the people who have sustained them all this while. The nature of use of the sea shore by the fishing community and tribal community does not even figure in the concerns. Everywhere, in such plans, it is what will be useful for the big fish in the tourism industry which gets first priority.

Similarly, when building projects are coming up, people having cow sheds, for instance, in the project area are seen as obstacles because of the smells of the cow dung that rend the air. So much for their veneration of cows! These are double standards indeed, whereby to consider cow dung and dry fish a stink is made to seem normal, while opposition to 'development' which entails appropriation of land or its use by a select few is made to seem abnormal.

The problems likely to be faced on account of a project by local communities and even

migrants who have contributed and are contributing to the sustainability of the natural resources, even as they draw their livelihoods from them, are minimized or completely ignored, and these communities are seen as dispensable in interest of the development project which is projected to be for the greater good. This term 'greater good' is shorthand for the good of big corporates and this identity called the nation, which means the privileged castes and corporate formations in the country, who are being treated not just as persons on par with human beings but as the most important of all.

It is time we removed the blinkers from consultants' and EIA-preparing agencies' narratives that seek to normalize a view that local people and poor people are obstacles to development, and which cause fissures in people's solidarity by playing divide and rule between the traditional communities/local people and the migrant poor, while the big fish take the entire cake.

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