



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND POLITICS AT THE MARGINS: ENVIRONMENTAL DISPLACEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

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The research project “Sustainable Livelihoods and Politics at the Margins: Environmental Displacement in South Asia” explores how people perceive and negotiate their weather and climate related displacement, and how they struggle for their right to earn a sustainable living. The project (2018-2022) is led by anthropologist Professor Sirpa Tenhunen. The researchers of the project are Dayabati Roy, Jasim Mohammad Uddin and Jelena Salmi. The broad aim of the project is to understand the process of environmental displacement and thereby generate novel ideas and insights to improve theory, policy and practice by means of which the environmental migrants’ right to sustainable livelihoods could be ensured. The focus of the project is on the displaced people in Bangladesh and India, countries which have been ranked as being among the most vulnerable to climate change over the next 30 years. Two researchers of the project have observed the recent increase in climate change induced migration in their hometowns – Mohammad Jasim Uddin in Sylhet, Bangladesh and Dayabati Roy in Kolkata, India.

Much of the decades-old scholarly debate on environmental displacements has focused on legal categories or

environmental aspects. By looking at how different types of weather and climate related phenomena (floods, cyclones and the rise of seawater) constrain social life in specific ways, the project contributes to the understanding of the entanglement of nature and society. We argue for a repoliticization of the debate on climate change, acknowledging that its impacts do not just have natural causes. We also develop the anthropological understandings of the notions of holism and sustainability to understand interrelated social changes. The increasingly unpredictable effects of the climate change challenge the understanding of sustainability as being about remaining in ecological balance with nature or based on enduring future predictability. We explore sustainability based on ethnographic data on human agency under the constraints of environmental challenges aiming to develop novel ways to understand sustainability as more than economic adaptation to environmental challenges. Selection of three field sites from India and Bangladesh (Kolkata, Sylhet, Sundebans, Bihar) enables a comparative perspective between state policies and localities faced with different kind of natural phenomenon (floods, cyclones and the rise of seawater level).



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