

11.201, Gateway: Planning Action
Prof. Xavier de Souza Briggs
Lecture 16

Questions to discuss:

How would you judge the effectiveness of the Narmada Bachao Andolan?
Does this movement provide a real alternative to developmental planning processes, or does it merely offer a critique of current forms of planning?

Raj argued that the movement in the Narmada valley was, on the whole, a failure. Of course, this doesn't mean that the movement did not serve any purpose, or did not achieve any of its objectives. Would you agree or disagree with this statement?

Looking at the outcome, it does seem that the movement was a failure, because the Supreme Court ruled against the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Positive outcomes:

The World Bank made some changes to its policies and the assessment criteria of projects that it funded.

The NBA movement mobilized transnational action on an issue that has largely been ignored in the past, or would continue to be ignored had this movement not taken place.

The Tribunal broke away to an extent from colonial laws. For example, the Tribunal had set a land-for-land award for those who were going to be displaced because of the project. Note, however, that the decision to award land for land compensation was a top down decision, and did not necessarily result from the movement itself.

The Gujarat government was forced to make the resettlement package more attractive because of international and domestic pressure. However, the other States of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh couldn't follow. In fact, the Madhya Pradesh government admitted that there wasn't enough land to accommodate the needs of all those who would have been displaced.

The fact that we are having this conversation about the movement in Massachusetts is a positive sign.

How should the project have been planned? Did the circumstances justify a more radical form of planning (similar to Lerner's planning style in Brazil) or was a more incremental form of planning more appropriate?

Planners from above have to learn to cope with sudden, unexpected action taken by planners from below. The same applies to planners from below. For example, the Government of Gujarat decided in 1993 to open floodgates against orders from above.

Limitations of Courts and the Law:

The NBA had a deep suspicion of courts. Since the dispute was to be solved within the court, the NBA was restrained by the legal system. The NBA filed a petition in 1994, and at the same time, hoped to continue other forms of resistance and protests. However, they were prohibited from talking to the media, or organizing rallies, or holding demonstrations.

The court could only interpret the legitimacy of the Sardar Sarovar Project in terms of whether it complied with existing laws or not. There was agreement over the fact that a better R and R plan needed to be established, but there was no capacity to implement the plan.

Would you consider the fact that the World Bank pulled out of the project a success or a failure?

In 1993, this was a huge moral victory for the NBA. However, 10 years down the line, it might be viewed as a failure because the World Bank had the financial resources to carry out a proper feasibility study and ensure that the rights of indigenous people would be protected. Success is a social construct. It is not a technocratic term. The definition of success has changed over the past few years, just like the definition of "economic growth" or "development".

The objective of the NBA was to stop the construction of the dam, or alternatively, to get a better R and R package. These objectives were fairly narrowly defined, and the NBA did not have any broad, secondary goals like stimulating discussion on human rights, or getting the World Bank and other international organizations to change their practices, or set an example of powerful social movement.

The NBA put a lot of faith in the Judicial System. What they did not realize was that the Supreme Court has tremendous authority, and it is extremely difficult to fight against powerful institutions within the constraints of the legal system. This is one of the harsh political lessons learnt in this movement.

India does not have a national policy on resettlement and rehabilitation. There is no process of calculating what an appropriate package might offer. Currently, this issue is being floated in the Cabinet, but whether a national policy will be implemented isn't certain.

The World Bank had violated its own policy on resettlement and rehabilitation and environmental issues. It had clear guidelines that no funding would be provided unless local environmental regulations were met, and the needs of indigenous people were met.

Changes in the World Bank:

The World Bank has been forced to think about its policies and practices. However, there is a debate over whether the NBA has brought about a serious change in the way the World Bank functions. For example, in 2005, the World Bank sharply increased its funding for hydroelectric power projects. Some would argue that increasing funding for hydroelectric projects means that the World Bank is paying

more attention to the scope and feasibility of hydro-electric projects, and will be more sensitive to other issues relevant to such projects such as human rights, environmental concerns, etc. However, in general, there is skepticism over whether the World Bank has truly mended its ways.

After 2003, support for hydroelectric power has increased. The National Hydroelectric Power Corporation of India was established by the Central Government in 1975, and today, is the largest organization in hydro-power development in India. It has no internal mechanism to evaluate impacts or effectiveness of hydropower projects in particular locations. In fact, State agencies have taken legal action against the NHPC on certain occasions, for violating state environmental regulations during the implementation of projects by the NHPC.

Did the NBA have a planning process?

It seems that their style was similar to the advocacy planning process. The main issue of conflict was the question of "development" versus "no development". There is a normative vision that underlies developmental planning. Planners in favor of radical development projects have this notion of "catching up" with developed nations. Ensuring that communities are not broken up, that environmental protection is considered, that rights are protected while pursuing this goal of development is extremely difficult even in a country like India, where the State has tremendous power and resources to get things done.

How might the indigenous people view the outcome of this social movement? This movement has forced them to engage better in local and national political processes. The government has to take this into account in future projects. Note that these people have encountered the modern economy, and were not completely isolated from the political and economic system before this movement. For example, they have been selling forest products in commercial markets for many years now. There is no easy way to measure if the engagement of indigenous people into the modern economy and the political system has tainted their culture. In the video, for example, we saw an example of a family that had been farming for many generations on land that was flooded because of the dams, and was forced to move to the city in search of employment.

The NBA movement has triggered changes in international norms, but hasn't brought about significant changes in domestic laws.

The NBA's protests caught the attention of the World Bank, and Medha Patkar was invited to DC. She was not a very charismatic leader. She had given up a comfortable life to join this struggle, but she did not have political clout, or legitimacy in the eyes of the government.

There are similar cases of dam construction in other countries like Laos. There are multiple hydro projects in consideration, and the World Bank supports these projects. The Bank thinks these projects can be socially, environmentally and economically sustainable.

Some history on the World Bank:

The Bank's goal was to repair poor economies. First several loans that the Bank gave out were to western countries. The first loan that the Bank gave to a developing country was in 1948 (to Columbia). Today, the bank is viewed as a body in charge of poverty alleviation. The International Monetary Fund's goal is also to reduce poverty. It is interesting, though, that the World Bank's articles of agreement do not feature words such as Poverty or Environmental Sustainability.

In the 1980's there was no viable credit market. Countries were in debt, and if you didn't have access to World Bank credit, you couldn't get financing for anyone else for development projects. However, things are changing slowly. For example, in India, domestic capitalists are increasingly funding private projects, but the World Bank still has clout.

In the case of the Narmada Social Movement, there were multiple actors at domestic, national and international levels and there were multiple opinions. However, the State proved to be the most powerful actor, and the law was the language of the State. Political scientists have questioned what democracy truly means in India.

Questions:

Would you view freedom as a means or as an end? Freedom should be viewed as a means to attain a goal, or as a goal itself. Rights of individuals determine the degree of freedom they hold, e.g. the right to information, the right to assemble, the right to ownership, and the right to a remedy in the face of a problem. Rights connect ideas of justice and freedom to institutions.

Xav's instructions on the Memo:

Your job is to make professional judgments about how much background to give in the memo.

Bad option: Just presenting a summary of the information in Raj's article

Good option: Presenting information relevant to your analysis