

“modern town with complete facilities on an extensive scale”, reported *Xinhua* on 18 March.

The report quoted Tashi Dorjee, director of the Nature Reserve Management Division of the TAR Forestry and Grassland Bureau, as saying that the purpose of the relocation was “to allow people from extremely high altitude areas to enjoy a better level of life with health protection and public services, while reducing human activities to protect the environment and return nature to wild animals.”

Dorjee blamed global warming and increasing population for exacerbating the “contradiction between domestic animals and wild animals competing for grassland resources” creating problems for the ecological protection of natural reserves. He further claimed that grasslands were deteriorating at an annual rate of 3 to 5 per cent in nine of the nature reserves in the high altitude areas including Tsonyi (Ch: Shuanghu) County in Nagchu.

Tsonyi is one of the seven counties that come under the Qiangtang National Nature Reserve located in Nagchu and Ngari spanning 298,000 square kilometers, which accounts for 25% of the TAR’s total land area. While the counties of Amdo, Nyima, and Tsonyi are located in Nagchu, Gertse, Gegye, Rutok and Gar are in Ngari. Tsonyi lies in the middle of the nature reserve with 135 staff members employed in the county's 15 wildlife management and conservation stations.

The relocation project will result in making nearly 350,000 square kilometers of land

unavailable for human activities, a substantial number considering that the combined land size of Ngari, Nagchu, and Shigatse is more than 800,000 sq. km. More than 80 per cent of the targeted area under the plan consists of protected areas from where all grazing is banned and nomadic livelihood is criminalised. Chinese authorities claimed that the relocation plan would improve the ecological environment by increasing grassland coverage by an average of 10 to 20 per cent.

"China is advancing a deceptive narrative that frames the relocation/resettlement policy as an environmental protection project, rather than a full-scale land grab to control the headwaters of six of the largest rivers of Asia."

By the end of last year, 2900 people from Tsonyi County had been relocated nearly 1,000 km towards the south to a newly-built resettlement village named Sumpori Village, Gongkar (Ch: Gongga) County, Lhokha (Ch: Shannan) City. Located on the north bank of the Yarlung Tsangpo, Sumpori is over 10 km from Lhasa Gongkar Airport and over 60 kilometers from Lhasa city.

In January 2019, Zhang Jianhua, the Party secretary of Tsonyi had announced the relocation of about 3,900 residents from the county's three townships, insisting that the

“relocation policy is not coercive, it's optional”.

Chinese authorities continue to project the relocation policy as a means to combat climate change, “solve the contradiction between man and nature, and to make room for wild animals”.

This despite the fact that a growing number of Chinese and foreign grassland experts have cautioned against settling nomads citing the necessity of livestock mobility to ensure the health of the grasslands and mitigate negative impacts of global warming.

"By displacing and dispossessing Tibetan nomads, Chinese authorities have advanced a deceptive narrative that frames the relocation/resettlement policy as an environmental protection project, rather than a full-scale land grab to control the headwaters of six of the largest rivers of Asia."

China's nomad relocation policy values grass and water as more important than livestock and pastoral livelihoods. This perverse prioritisation ignores global pastoral practices of maintaining a balance between grazing animals and grass, a balance usually maintained productively and sustainably through the strategy of mobility.

In a critical indictment of the devastating impacts of the relocation policy, development specialist Gabriel Lafitte wrote: “On a map, this looks like an impressive commitment to grow more grass and sequester more carbon, offsetting all those coal fired emissions. On the ground, for hundreds of thousands of pastoral nomads, it means total loss of livelihood, herded off their land into concrete barracks often far from their lands, their herds compulsorily sold, with no training to enter the modern cash economy of wage labour.”

Chinese cadres and migrants resume work at Tibet dam amid coronavirus fears

Chinese authorities have announced the return of Chinese cadres and migrant workers to resume work at the Jiacha Hydropower Station that was put into operation during the 13th Five-Year Plan" (2016-2020) period.

Located in Gyatsa (Ch: Jiacha) County in Lhoka (Ch: Shannan) City, TAR, the Jiacha dam is one of the three hydro dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo including Dagu and Jiexu announced in 2013 by the State Council as part of its new Energy Development Plan.

Amid the coronavirus epidemic in early March this year, the Yajiang branch of the China Huaneng Group Company that was responsible for building the Jiacha hydropower station was sending a team of 24 Chinese employees to resume work at

the hydropower station, reported the *China Tibet Network* on 19 March. The team travelled through Yunnan province, reached Markham (Ch: Ma'erkang) County in Chamdo (Ch: Changdu) City on 3 March, and finally arrived in Lhasa on 5 March.

On 9 February, a group of Chinese cadres and personnel arrived in Tibet by plane and subsequently returned to their posts at the hydropower station.

This was followed by the return of an unspecified number of Chinese migrant workers from Kunming (Yunnan) and Langzhong (Sichuan) via a high-speed rail on 13 February to resume work at the hydropower station.

Yet another unspecified number of Chinese migrant workers travelling by train on 27 February from Ningqiang and Sanyuan in Shaanxi province similarly joined work at the hydropower station.

The day after, on 28 February, more Chinese migrant workers followed suit travelling by train from Ledu (Qinghai), Guangyuan (Sichuan) and Hanzhong (Shaanxi).

There were others like the three Chinese migrant workers from Fushun, Sichuan who travelled by private vehicle on 1 March to resume work.

Nine migrant workers from Panzhou (Guizhou province) and five from Emei (Sichuan) also travelled by car on 3 and 4 March respectively to resume work at the hydropower station.

During the outbreak of the epidemic when almost all Chinese workers had left home, some local Tibetans had been temporarily hired to work on the construction site although their lowly paid unskilled position is evident from a Tibetan worker named Tashi Wangdu who had been working there for almost a month pouring wet concrete.

The Jiacha Hydropower Station has three units with a total installed capacity of 360000 kilowatts and total investment of 7.83 billion yuan. The first unit is planned to generate electricity in June 2020.

According to the International Rivers, the Huaneng Group has a poor environmental track record although it is China's largest and only national state-owned power generating company with a total electricity output of 537.6 billion kWh from an installed capacity of 113 GW. Its annual sustainable development reports published since 2006 "generally lack substance and detailed policies".

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