

I Don't Want To Perish Here': How Mandalika Special Economic Zone Drives the Locals Out of Their Source of Livelihood: Reflective Essay

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We often hear about the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) like the Mandalika in Indonesia, praised as necessary steps toward economic progress. These zones attract foreign investment and boost tourism, drawing parallels with similar global efforts. The Mandalika project on the island of Lombok was supposed to create jobs and transform the region into a prime tourist destination. However, the narrative presented in the Pulitzer Center's article, "I Don't Want To Perish Here": How Mandalika Special Economic Zone Drives the Locals Out of Their Source of Livelihood," offers a sobering counterpoint, emphasizing the profound human and cultural costs associated with such projects.

This reflection explores the deep conflicts between economic development and the rights of local communities. The indigenous Sasak people, who have inhabited these lands for generations, find themselves increasingly marginalized. Their lands, essential to their livelihood and cultural practices, have been appropriated by the government, often with promises of compensation and relocation that are rarely fulfilled adequately.

This scenario is distressingly common in SEZ developments worldwide, where the rush to attract global capital often overlooks the basic rights and needs of the local population. The locals of Mandalika, like many others in similar situations, are portrayed as obstacles rather than stakeholders in the development process. Their displacement not only threatens their livelihoods but also poses a severe risk to their cultural identity and heritage.

The resistance of the Mandalika locals, as described in the article, serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and agency of communities fighting to preserve their way of life. It highlights the broader issue of land rights, a critical concern for indigenous and local communities globally. In Mandalika, the struggle is not just for land but for dignity, heritage, and a sustainable future.

Reflecting on this, we are reminded of the many historical instances where economic 'progress' has led to similar displacements and disruptions. Whether it's the Native

American tribes in the United States or tribal communities in India facing displacement due to mining and industrial projects, the pattern is alarmingly consistent. Development projects promise prosperity but often deliver a legacy of disruption and hardship to those directly impacted.

The story of Mandalika is a crucial lesson in the ethics of development. It challenges us to question who benefits from these projects and at what cost. As we move forward, there must be a reevaluation of what true progress means. Development should not merely be measured by economic output or tourist numbers but must take into account the well-being and consent of all affected parties.

In this context, participatory development approaches appear vital. These involve local communities in decision-making processes from the outset, ensuring that development projects not only mitigate harm but actively enhance the communities they touch. Moreover, such strategies can lead to more sustainable and just outcomes, preserving cultural heritage while fostering economic opportunities that are inclusive.