Dam Truths: A compilation of case studies about popular struggles against dams
The Blue Planet Project is a global initiative with partners around the world that work to achieve the goal of water justice now. Water justice is based on the right to water and on the principles that water is a public trust and part of a global commons.
Introduction

While water is now undisputedly recognized by the United Nations as a human right, communities defending their right to water continue to face an uphill battle against industries that are destroying watersheds. Prime among these is the dam industry, which remains a major threat to freshwater sources and the human right to water around the world.

This compilation of case studies on anti-dam struggles by the Blue Planet Project highlights the ongoing plight of dam-affected communities and threats to their right to water.

In 2001 the World Commission on Dams (WCD), a multi-stakeholder body set up by the World Bank and the World Conservation Union, released a report arguing that the environmental and social costs of dams outweighed the benefits. While there were strong criticisms from activists about the involvement of consultants with ties to the dam industry, in the end the active participation of NGOs and people’s movements produced a report that exposed the ecological damage and social injustices generated by dams.¹

As International Rivers puts it:

The report boils down to this: worldwide, large dams haven’t provided the benefits that their promoters had predicted. At the same time, the negative impacts of large dams have been far greater than imagined. The report finds that the status quo is unacceptable; that outstanding social and environmental problems associated with existing dams need to be addressed; and that the rights of all people, particularly Indigenous peoples, must be respected.²

The case studies on anti-dam struggles presented in this publication demonstrate that despite the alarm bells sounded in the WCD report against dam constructions, and its call to search for alternatives, the dam industry continues to thrive with the support of governments and international financial institutions.

The environmental and social impacts of dams are exacerbated in today’s context of climate change and increased water scarcity. As International Rivers argues, large dams are built on the assumption that stream-flow patterns will be constant, yet climate is drastically altering these patterns. Dams also impact the ability of communities to adapt to climate change by destroying the health of river systems. Yet the dam industry today has been given new momentum by being packaged as a “clean energy” solution to the climate crisis.

Dams are also promoted as a solution to the water crisis. As Maude Barlow, Blue Planet Project founder, noted on a recent trip to Mexico, the Mexican government uses human right to water discourse to promote mega dam projects that expropriate land and water from communities.

The South African and Canadian case studies demonstrate the tremendous inequalities generated by dam projects designed to meet the water and energy needs of the dominant group while denying the basic rights of indigenous and black populations. These cases demonstrate clearly that the “benefits” of dam projects, be they economic wealth or access to basic services, come at tremendous expense to historically marginalized communities.

The Mexican case study shows how the lack of popular support for dams has created a climate of social tension and violence for communities that speak out against the building of dams. It also shows the undemocratic methods used to impose the construction of dams against the will of the people.

¹ http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1253&context=auilr
However, the case study of dams in India also demonstrates the power of people’s resistance to dams in a country where, despite strong state support for the industry and pressure from international financial institutions to develop dams, people’s movements have managed to halt major projects.

The Blue Planet Project sees mega dams as one of the biggest threats to scarce freshwater sources in the world today. The defence of freshwater against dams is intimately linked to struggles for social and economic justice in the world today.
Constructing Large Dams in Southern Africa: What has been learned?

By Mary Galvin

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About the Author

Mary Galvin has worked in South Africa as a researcher, development practitioner, and social justice activist since 1992. In 2008 she started the non-profit organization Umphilo waManzi in South Africa, which does advocacy and action research on water and sanitation issues. Mary is also a Senior Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg’s Department of Anthropology and Development Studies. She has been part of the Blue Planet Project team since December 2011, helping to monitor and promote the realization of the human right to water in South Africa and globally.

Dams in Southern Africa are expressions of the region’s history: the apartheid regime and colonial governments built dams with little or no concern about the people displaced or their environmental impacts. The focus was on overcoming the limitations of a water-scarce Southern Africa and obtaining electricity to feed the growth of cities, agriculture and industry. Although dams benefit these users, equitable distribution was not a consideration. In addition, the far-reaching hydrological impacts of dams with large reservoirs can increase poverty in dam-affected populations (including a typically large population of downstream communities).

With continually growing demand for water and shrinking resources as a result of climate change, dam building projects continue apace. Most recently, South Africa embarked on the second phase of the mega-project, the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). Expectations of changes by a post-apartheid government were dashed – the second and third of five prospective dams were commissioned after 1994, despite LHWP’s status as the highest-profile corruption case in Third World development.¹

What lessons have been learned and changes made as a result of experiences with the Kariba (Zambia-Zimbabwe), Cahora Bassa (Mozambique), and Pongolapoort and Loskop (South Africa) dams? How is this evidenced in present day decisions about the new dams of the LHWP (Lesotho-South Africa) and Mphanda Nkuwa and Batoka Gorge, planned for the Zambezi?

Apartheid and colonial interests feeding industry’s needs

Constructed in the mid-1950s, the hydroelectric Kariba Dam is the world’s largest reservoir (by volume) and spans the Zambezi River between present day Zambia and Zimbabwe. It was built to provide power for the Zambian copperbelt and most of Zimbabwe. It also required the World Bank’s largest loan at the time, and supported Rhodesian racist colonialism and major mining corporations, but for many years did not supply electricity to most black Zimbabweans and Zambians.² The dam displaced more than 57,000 people of the Tonga ethnic group living along the Zambezi, destroying their livelihoods without compen-

¹ International Rivers Project, www.internationalrivers.org/resources/lesotho-water-project-corruption-3662
² Bond, undated.
sation. Eight people were killed and 32 injured in resettlement protests. Most tellingly, the Rhodesian’s focus was on “Operation Noah,” a wildlife rescue operation that saved 6,000 animals displaced by the formation of Lake Kariba and the flooding of the Zambezi Valley.

Although many Zambian dam-affected communities finally gained access to water and irrigation systems after independence, research shows that little has changed for people who were resettled. In fact, many refer to Kariba as the “worst dam-resettlement disaster in African history.” Many people are still “development refugees,” living in areas that are “so seriously degraded within the last generation that they resemble lands on the edge of the Sahara Desert.”

Following numerous failed efforts to be heard by government, the Tonga formed the Basilwizi Trust in 2000 to define their needs and build skills to directly lobby decision-makers. They are still working to revive their culture, establish food security, and access the very electricity that the dam produces – 50 years later. Calling for reparations from the World Bank and other agencies involved in building the dam, the group states:

Such compensation could be in monetary terms, decommissioning of the dam, official recognition of past and current injustices suffered, or complete restoration of the ecosystems. A new dialogue to correct the wrongs committed should commence. The Tonga are ... trying to find solutions to their predicament and to rise out of the imposed poverty.

The safety of Kariba Dam remains a concern. In March 2010 rising water levels required opening the floodgate and 130 000 people living in the floodplain were evacuated. In 2012 International Rivers Network reported concerns about the stability of the dam and the safety of the millions of people living downstream.

Another large hydropower dam, Cahora Bassa, was built in Mozambique during its colonial war by South African and Portuguese interests to supply South Africa and neighbouring countries with electricity. Little information on the social and environmental impacts of the dam on communities was gathered during the war. The International Rivers Network states: “The Cahora Bassa Dam has had significant detrimental downstream impacts all the way to the Zambezi delta and is considered by experts to be one of the least studied and most environmentally destructive large dams in Africa.”

What is known is that 42,000 people affected by the dam (a near-doubling of the projected 25,000 people the project was expected to affect) and their communities gained almost nothing from the influx of construction jobs. At the outset, to attract necessary foreign capital, the project used local labourers who worked long hours for little pay and faced dangerous working conditions. However, once funds were secured, outside international professionals and migrant labourers from southern Mozambique (with experience from South African mines) were contracted to construct the dam. Most sinister was how the Portuguese used the relocation process as a means of disconnecting people in these rural communities from political groups fighting for independence – they shuffled people into small camps that were isolated, poorly designed and offered little or no services. Food scarcity became widespread and the death rate rose.

References:
3 World Commission on Dams, 2000
4 Leslie, 2005
5 Thayer, 2010
6 Hathaway, 2008
7 http://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/266/concerns-about-kariba-dam’s-stability
8 http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/2602
9 Isaacman & Sneddon, 2000
The dam was completed in 1974 during the rapid withdrawal of the Portuguese and Mozambiquan independence. During the civil war that followed, Renamo destroyed power lines that connected Cahora Bassa to South Africa. These were repaired in the 1990s when the war ended and South Africa began its democratic transition. But Mozambique did not benefit from the dam for decades as the dam was owned by Portuguese interests until 2007. Power went back to South African electricity parastatal Eskom, then was sold back to Mozambique at a profit. The Green Energy Plan for Mozambique refers to the technical, financial and national security implications of this situation:

Mozambique is in the awkward position of having to export electricity from Cahora Bassa via the RSA Eskom transmission system, and re-import it for use in the southern part of the country, namely Maputo. The transport of electricity via this system encourages a relatively high waste of electricity, as large amounts of power are lost in these transactions. Secondly, HCB (Cahora Bassa Hydro Electric) must first export power to Eskom, which in turn sells the power back to southern Mozambique at an increased rate.

So not only is little or no attention being paid to forms of compensation to address the past injustices that took place during the construction of the original dam, the “bigger picture” is a type of economic apartheid with these projects. In the case of Cahora Bassa, it primarily benefits South Africa and the big aluminium firm Mozal. As the above report advocates, it is time for Mozambique to build projects that will benefit its citizens, not the export market.

Charting a new course and redressing past damage in South Africa?

Chaired by then-South African Water Affairs Minister Kadar Asmal, the World Commission on Dams (WCD) established guidelines for dam builders, including the requirement that communities affected by dams need to be better off after the dam is constructed, and also benefit directly from such projects. Maguga Dam in Swaziland – a repressive monarchy – was built with the WCD standards in mind in terms of relocating people and ensuring their livelihoods were restored. This was confirmed by community members at the 1999 South African hearings for dam-affected communities, which was organised for the WCD. But most other new and ongoing projects in Africa have ignored these best-practice standards.

Following the WCD and engagement by South African stakeholders, the South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) produced a document outlining dam resettlement and social issues. In 2004/5 it also initiated a social audit of South Africa’s approximately 500 dams. Consultants identified nine dam-affected communities that faced broadly “representative” issues, and arranged a meeting with them These included communities neighbouring Gariep, Van der Kloof, Sandile, Kat rivier, Loskop, Thapani, Woodstock, Quedisisi, Inanda, and Pongolapoort dams. Perhaps due to a change of Ministers in DWAF, the process was apparently abandoned. Eight years later, no further meetings have been held and communities are still waiting for an outcome. DWAF’s undertaking to resolve outstanding issues at existing dams was also not met.

The examples below provide an overview of the main issues facing South Africa’s dam-affected communities, particularly regarding access to water.

**Pongolapoort/ Jozini Dam** was built in response to Afrikaans farmers who wanted irrigation to expand farming to Makatini flats in 1969-1972. The dam basin included primarily white farmers. The only reference to the community was compensation for nine “bantu huts.” After the dam was constructed, farmers lost interest when the envisaged large-scale irrigation to Makatini flats did not materialise. However,
it was too late for communities downstream as the natural Pongolo flood regime was disrupted and their traditional livelihood (fish traps) was destroyed.

In 1994, conflict erupted between traditional users and cotton cartels after Monsanto began GMO trials with cotton in the area. At the 1998 WCD hearings in Cape Town, there were reports of water committees being unable to operate and people disappearing and later discovered as having “drowned.” Currently Jozini is managed primarily as a conservation area, and is surrounded by game reserves and lodges.

While the dam water is underutilised, for the past 43 years the majority of communities have had insufficient access to water for domestic and productive uses. This has been raised by communities as well as top political leadership, including the KwaZulu-Natal Premier, but the issue has moved no further. In the interim, a commercial farmer was granted an extraction permit with the proviso that he supply some water to communities.13

Built in the 1930s, there are no official records of communities affected by Loskop Dam on the border of Mpumalanga and Limpopo. However, in keeping with government policies at the time, people were relocated or restricted to deep rural areas without access to water. In 2006 DWAF contracted consultants to audit all families that were relocated as a result of dam construction. Numerous workshops were held in Pretoria, and community meetings and visits took place. People filled out forms with the promise that they would be compensated for their losses when removed from the perimeters of the dam. After raising these expectations, there has been no further communication with community members and no change. One community member explained:

Our community is almost 15 km from the wall of the dam but there is no clean and running water in this area. The village was built in 1903, but up to date our people are dying of thirst and no one cares. There are two parallel bulk water pipes coming from Weledevrede Water Treatment plant... that were constructed to solve the water crisis in our area, but they do not work. Instead our taxes were used to benefit the ‘tenderpreneurs’ and corrupt municipal officials. Now the Sekhukhune District Municipality is constructing another bulk water pipeline, from Groblersdal town that is 38 km away, to our area to give us clean water.14

At a local imbizo (meeting) in 2009, Minister of Water Affairs Sonjika announced that the government had set aside $47.5 million to build a new purification plant for the area and $2.5 million for engineers to begin feasibility studies and drawings for a bulk water line from the dam and the plant. Recently, Sekhukhune District Municipality officials said the project has been cancelled, while the DWA said the project is still proceeding. People from the area have approached a legal rights NGO to assist with litigation to force the municipal government to do its job of providing clean water.15

“New” Developments: Learning from the past?

To deal with industry’s ever-expanding and unsustainable water demand in Gauteng (Johannesburg and Pretoria), the South African government and the World Bank pressured a Lesotho government that was less than receptive to agree to the Lesotho Highland Water Treaty. However, there was a military coup in 1986, and Lesotho agreed to sell its water resources to South Africa the following year. The mega project moved forward with World Bank funding. The five-phase Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) includes the development of multiple dams, transfer tunnels and a hydropower station. The first

13 Ashe interview 2012
14 Mathebe communication, 2012
15 Mathebe communication, 2012
phase of construction, which occurred during the early 1990s through 2004, included the Katse Dam, the Muela hydropower station, kilometers of transfer and delivery tunnels (phase 1A), the Mohale Dam and additional transfer tunnels (phase 1B). Marred by massive corruption, it is not surprising that the LHWP has resulted in environmental devastation and human suffering. In 1998, the Katse Dam was the site of a shootout in which more than two dozen Basotho soldiers were killed by South African Defence Force troops who, in the context of a rumoured coup, helicoptered into the country overnight to protect the dam wall from presumed threats.

In 1999, with Ronnie Kasrils as the new water minister, saw the Lesotho Highlands Water Project become the highest-profile corruption case in the Third World. The CEO of the LHWP was charged with accepting bribes from numerous multinational corporations seeking contracts on the project. Even the World Bank began to debar some of the dozen multinational corporations convicted of bribing Lesotho officials, one of which (the giant Canadian firm Acres International) effectively closed due to the revelations.\textsuperscript{16}

Devastating environmental impacts included reduced wetlands and fisheries, flooding, endangered species and the reduction of water for people and wildlife. Hunger became prevalent in the Highlands. In contrast to the stated intention for the LHWP to encourage development, reduce poverty and provide revenues for social spending, the construction of the Katse and Mohale dams negatively affected more than 152,000 people who lost their homes, farmland and livelihoods.\textsuperscript{17}

Although the project resulted in $20 million in compensation, which is considered generous compared to other resettlement programs, it has failed to adequately equip displaced people with the resources and support needed to re-establish their livelihoods. The compensation policy was revamped to include three options: a yearly grain payment (as a substitute for crops that were lost), an annual cash disbursement, or a one-time lump sum. Many people were unable to create the business plan required for the one-time payment, resulting in payments taking years to process. Other compensation issues include:

- replacement housing that was poorly constructed and originally designed without local needs in mind;
- financial compensation did not cover the future production capacity of the land and failed to include a number of essential assets;
- the cost of living was higher in new areas, making it difficult for people to sustain their households;
- paying compensation to the head of the household, generally the oldest male, resulted in severe gender inequalities;
- communal compensation to rebuild shared community assets required an approved development plan, which resulted in long delays;
- people who were resettled were not always made aware of their rights. There were varying levels of compensation, and promises of better services in new areas never materialised;
- corruption reduced resources intended for compensation, and
- construction jobs for the dams brought in a large transient workforce to remote, impoverished villages, with serious implications for the country’s HIV/AIDS epidemic.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Bond, 2002
\textsuperscript{17} Thamae & Pottinger, 2006: 76
\textsuperscript{18} Hoover, 2001; Thamae & Pottinger, 2006
With phase two set to proceed in 2011, studies are now underway on the Polihali Dam and two reservoirs. The most corrupt official was reappointed to the project in 2012 after serving jail time. Phase two will displace another 17 villages and impact the agricultural lands of an additional 71 villages, affecting 16,560 people, with no clear plan of remedial action. It appears that, once again, the LHWP will relocate thousands, threaten food security by reducing the amount of fertile land, and continue to damage the ecosystem.

While social risks are very important, the risks that climate change will make dams obsolete or dangerous, and harm ecosystem services and people’s ability to adapt, is especially important in Southern Africa. Hydropower dams could become white elephants due to water shortages and scarcity as well as safety risks of being unprepared for larger, faster floods. These issues require urgent attention for existing dams, but certainly any new dams must be evaluated for climate change’s hydrological uncertainty. This has not been done for either dam being planned on the Zambezi, Batoka Gorge or Mphanda Nkuwa.

Conclusion

Dam-affected communities in Southern Africa are calling for access to water, sometimes from the very dams that displaced them, for recognition of their situation, and for reparations. While there has been engagement in the WCD process and signs of government action, communities are generally frustrated by the failure to move past merely talking and actually respond to these calls. Yet this is far from surprising – the LHWP is proceeding with more modern versions of the same damage wrought by colonial and apartheid governments. Problem-ridden programmes for dam-affected communities, as well as a disregard for wider distribution and equity issues, require civil society vigilance and action. Lesotho has a strong group working with dam-affected people, particularly through the important work of the Transformation Resource Centre, but there has been little response in South Africa to the dams. The key question is whether activists in Southern Africa can learn from social movements that have arisen around dam struggles in other parts of the world, and organise communities that are geographically and culturally isolated from one another to respond to these life-impacting issues.

References


International Rivers documents:

On the first phase of LHWP: http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/4135

19 http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/7677
LHWP timeline: http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/3664

On LHWP corruption: www.internationalrivers.org/resources/lesotho-water-project-corruption-3662

On Cahora Bassa Dam: http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/2602 and http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/3541


and its safety: www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/266/concerns-about-kariba-dam’s-stability

On Climate change and hydrological impacts on dams: http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/7677


The Walls of Colonization: Hydroelectric dams and Indigenous communities in Canada

By Meera Karunananthan

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About the Author
Based in Ottawa, Canada, Meera Karunananthan is the International Water Campaigner for the Blue Planet Project. She works with groups and communities from around the world who are fighting to protect water as a human right and commons.

Indigenous communities in Canada have been disproportionately affected by the harmful social and environmental impacts of dams on rivers and watersheds that have sustained their traditional ways of life for millennia.

Canada is the world’s largest producer of hydroelectricity, accounting for nearly 15 per cent of the world’s total production.¹ According to the Canadian Dam Association, Canada is home to more than 10,000 dams, which are owned by the federal and provincial governments, electric utilities, industrial and mining companies.² The majority of large dams in Canada were built to produce electricity, although many hydroelectric dams are multi-functional and able to serve other purposes such as flood control and water storage.

Large dams have a tremendous impact on Canada’s rivers and freshwater systems. According to Environment Canada (2004), in the 1970s the Lake Winnipeg and Churchill-Nelson Rivers Project in Manitoba and the James Bay Project in Québec saw a level of inter-basin diversion that was unprecedented on the continent. Today, according to a 2011 World Wildlife Fund report, Canada diverts more water from one watershed to another than any other country.³

Unlike in the United States where large dams are no longer being built and many are being decommissioned,⁴ Canada continues to pursue the construction of large dams. While some deem the 1950s to 1990s to be the great dam building era in Canadian history,⁵ a number of large dams are currently under construction or being considered, particularly in northern Quebec, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories.

Given their very high environmental and social costs, dams have been the source of much conflict and controversy in Canada, much like in other parts of the world. Throughout their history, Canadian dams have displaced indigenous communities and devastated their lands and waters.

This case study examines the colonial legacy of Canadian dams through the examples of Quebec’s Plan Nord, Hydro Manitoba’s ever-expanding dam development pursuits, and the Muskrat Falls project in Labrador.

² http://www.imis100ca1.ca/cda/Main/Dams_in_Canada/CDA/Dams_in_Canada.aspx?hkey=63e199b2-d0e3-4eaf-b8ad-436d9415ad62
⁴ http://www.internationalrivers.org/frequently-asked-questions
⁵ http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/dams-and-diversions
Plan Nord and the Romaine River Hydro-dam complex

Quebec’s highly contested Plan Nord, launched by the Charest government in 2011, is a multibillion-dollar endeavour to develop Northern Quebec. The plan calls for a 3,500 megawatt expansion in hydroelectric projects. The proposal is to build a complex of four mega dams on the Romaine River – development that would devastate land that is home to the Inuit, the Innu, the Cree, the Naskapis of Schefferville, the Algonquin, and the Atikamekw, all of whom have voiced opposition to the project.\(^6\)

The Romaine River is one of the few pristine major rivers in the world. Thirteen of Quebec’s 15 major rivers are already dammed. The proposed dam complex would inundate the river, as well as many tributaries, lakes and deltas in the area.\(^7\) The project would open up the indigenous land to exploitation by big mining and forestry corporations that would purchase the electricity at a bargain price.\(^8\) There has been tremendous resistance from indigenous and non-indigenous communities to the plan.\(^9\)

L’Alliance Stratégique Innue, representing nearly 70 per cent of the Innu population, has opposed the project, arguing that there has been no “nation-to-nation” consultation with the Innu people about the development on their land.\(^10\) The Ekuanitshit, one of the most deeply affected Innu communities, argues that the Quebec government is illegally pursuing this massive development on land that does not belong to the province.\(^11\) The project will destroy the nautical route linking their traditional trap lines.\(^12\)

In addition, the 1550MW Romaine project on the north shore of the Romaine River is intended to produce electricity solely for export to the United States. This project, which threatens to destroy the environment and violate of indigenous rights will bring little benefit to the Quebecois and Indigenous people. It has resulted in mass mobilizations throughout the province led by groups such as the Rivers Foundation, Nature Quebec, and Société pour Vaincre la Pollution.

Manitoba

Much of the landscape of Northern Manitoba has been drastically altered over the past century by mega-dam developments, displacing the Cree of Northern Manitoba and devastating land and waters that they have relied on for generations. While the provincial government has made it a point to highlight the support of some First Nations for its hydro projects, the divisions within and between communities, and the historical oppression and ongoing struggles for environmental justice by Indigenous populations in Manitoba, have received little attention.

Approximately 50,000 square miles of Northern Prairie and boreal forest – approximately one-quarter of Manitoba’s total land area – is flooded by water from backed up rivers.\(^13\) This has resulted in major environmental impacts, including mercury contamination of lakes and rivers occurring from the erosion of mercury containing soil.

The history of dam building is a key component of the history of colonization and indigenous resistance in Manitoba. In order to develop Manitoba Hydro, the province dispossessed the indigenous communities that were thriving on traditional subsistence economies to build the dam at Grand Rapids in 1960 and the Nelson and Churchill Rivers in 1969. In 1960, the Cree of Chemawawin had little choice but to relocate from their naturally abundant original territory to Esterville to make way for the Grand Rapids

\(^6\) http://ausmcgill.com/aus/motion-oppose-plan-nord
\(^7\) http://www.montrealenvironment.ca/la-romaine-mega-dam-sparks-controversy/
\(^8\) http://allianceromaine.wordpress.com/information-about-the-issues/plan-nord/
\(^9\) http://allianceromaine.wordpress.com/information-about-the-issues/pland-nord/
\(^10\) http://dev.allianceinnue.org/fr/nouvelles
\(^11\) http://www.gitpa.org/Qui%20sommes%20nous%20GITPA%20100/ACTUlettre3.htm
\(^12\) http://www.gitpa.org/Qui%20sommes%20nous%20GITPA%20100/ACTUlettre3.htm
\(^13\) http://environmental.jrn.msu.edu/ej_fall2003.pdf
Dam. Esterville was a barren land with poor soil quality and little vegetation. It was further devastated by the rising waters of the dam, which destroyed moose, muskrat and fish habitat.¹⁴

Similarly, with little compensation for the loss of traditional economies, people in the South Indian Lake community were unable to pay the high electricity bills in the new homes they were forcibly moved to when the Churchill and Nelson Rivers were developed.

A 2009 study by Lakehead University points to long-term health impacts for people in communities whose traditional ways of life have been permanently altered by hydro dams in Manitoba.¹⁵ With store-bought food in the North being considerably more expensive than food sold in grocery stores in the South, the loss of food security and resulting health impacts are substantial.

In addition, the study raises strong concerns about impacts on water quality, challenging Environment Canada’s position that alterations to the watershed have not impacted the quality of water in the region. The study notes that the federal analysis fails to consider the suitability of the water for fishing or human consumption in its assessment of water quality.

In the 1970s, dam-impacted communities organized under the Northern Flood Agreement (NFA) to demand compensation and mitigation measures.¹⁶ But the province has circumvented the NFA to make side arrangements with band leaders, leaving some opponents — like the Pimicimakak of Cross Lake — high and dry.¹⁷

While Manitoba Hydro claims to have compensated communities for environmental and economic losses as per the NFA, community leaders point to high levels of poverty, more than 85 per cent unemployment rates, and suicide and alcoholism rates that are among the highest in the country as continuing proof of ongoing impacts.¹⁵

Environmental groups have demanded that the federal government engage in a thorough review of past and future hydro projects in Manitoba.¹⁹ Yet, despite a history of unresolved conflicts surrounding its dam projects, Manitoba Hydro remains in an expansionist mode.

Forty per cent of Manitoba’s electricity is exported to markets in the United States.²⁰ Manitoba Hydro’s most recent projects, the Keeyask and Conawapa, are attempts to expand U.S. markets at exorbitant costs that ratepayers in the province will be forced to absorb.²¹

The Wuskwatim Dam was completed recently despite much opposition from members of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, who led blockades to prevent the project from going forward in 2009.

**Muskrat Falls**

Nalcor, the power utility of Newfoundland and Labrador, is forging ahead with a project that would comprise of two hydroelectric generating stations on the lower Churchill River despite tremendous opposition by the Nunatsiavut Inuit people, the NunatuKavut and Quebec Indigenous groups, as well as environmental organizations like the Sierra Club.

¹⁴ http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs.mb_history/15/hydroelectricdevelopment.shtml  
²¹ http://www.thetelegram.com/Opinion/Columns/2012-12-04/article-3132964/Dam-projects-up-for-independent-review-in-Manitoba/1
The Nunatsiavut Government issued a statement in November 2012 arguing “the Muskrat Falls project will have significant adverse downstream impacts, present potential health risks and infringe on Inuit rights and land use.”

The federal/provincial Joint Review Panel, which carried out an environmental assessment of the proposal, concluded (among other concerns regarding water quality and the environment) that Nalcor had not conducted an adequate assessment of mercury contamination in the downstream environment:

The Panel concluded that Nalcor did not carry out a full assessment of the fate of mercury in the downstream environment, including the potential pathways that could lead to mercury bioaccumulation in seal and the potential for cumulative effects of the Project together with the effects of other sources of mercury. The Panel also concluded that downstream effects would likely be observed in Goose Bay over the long term, caused by changes in sediment, nutrient supply and water temperatures.

Nalcor recently won an injunction against members of the NunatuKavut community who have been organizing peaceful protests outside the Muskrat Falls construction site. The NunatuKavut, who lay claim to the land surrounding Muskrat Falls and the territory where transmission lines are to be built, are taking the federal government to court. They are arguing that the work of the Joint Review Panel was incomplete and does not mandate the federal government to issue permits or loan guarantees.

Conclusion

Dam projects in Canada highlight the federal government’s failure to uphold its obligations to indigenous communities. The case studies discussed in this paper are but a few key examples among many that demonstrate the historical and ongoing struggles of indigenous communities to defend their land and water against big dam projects in Canada. This occurs in a context where there is growing opposition to big dams around the world, and increasing evidence that they are the wrong solution for the world’s energy and water needs.

Furthermore, despite the tremendous resistance to dams by indigenous communities, there has been very little research by the federal and provincial governments on the long-term cumulative effects of the environmental and social costs of dams on affected communities and ecosystems in Canada and there are major gaps in the existing data. Among other concerns, while community-based and independent research has pointed to high levels of mercury contamination particularly in indigenous populations whose food sources are impacted by dam projects, Statistics Canada data on mercury contamination exclude people living on reserves, crown land and remote regions.

Recent efforts by the Conservative government to gut environmental legislation aimed at protecting freshwater resources and aquatic species through Bill C-45 will most certainly further undermine the rights of indigenous communities fighting hydroelectric dams.

First Nations groups have decried the gutting of the federal laws aimed at protecting fish habitat and navigation rights, which will allow for the development of industries that harm freshwater sources with fewer restrictions. Given navigation and the protection of fisheries are intimately linked to the traditions,
food security and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples, the impacts of these policies will further exacerbate the environmental racism experienced by frontline communities.
The struggles against dams and for rivers in Mexico

By Claudia Campero-Arena

About the Author

Claudia Campero-Arena is a Water Campaigner for Blue Planet Project and Food and Water Watch in Mexico. She helps coordinate with organizations around the world in international efforts such as celebrating Blue October and challenging the World Water Forum. She also promotes the human right to water and monitors water privatization in Mexico and other Latin-American countries to help raise awareness for action. She studied geography at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and holds a Masters in Urban Development Planning from the University College London. She is a founding and active member of COMDA (Coalition of Mexican Organizations for the Right to Water). She is also an active member of the Mexican movements of affected people by dams and mining (MAPDER and REMA).

Mexico has more than 4,462 dams, 667 of these are considered large dams. The dams’ purposes vary and include hydroelectricity, irrigation, water provision for cities and flooding control. For the last 60 years, the Mexican federal government has changed. Policies regarding many issues have varied, but one has remained constant: dams are perceived by the political elite as an important component of development. They are also a way to justify spending millions of pesos, some of which frequently get lost in the process. Indeed, corruption and lack of transparency in the budget spending are more rules than exceptions.

However, there is a growing movement that started in Mexico in 2004 to oppose these projects and defend rivers. MAPDER – its acronym in Spanish – is the Mexican Movement of People Affected by Dams and Defending Rivers. This movement has managed to support struggles around the country, including the struggle against El Zapotillo Dam in Temacapulín, Jalisco, La Parota Dam in Guerrero and many others.

The people of Temacapulín, Jalisco are currently experiencing what thousands of Mexicans – and tens of millions of dam-affected people around the world – have experienced. They are fighting a dam project that would drown their entire territory. For seven years, people from Temacapulín have been living this nightmare of being threatened by public officials with forceful eviction from their homes. El Zapotillo dam, which is now under construction, will drown 4,200 hectares of land that encompasses three communities: Temacapulín, Acasico and Palmarejo.

Mexico’s experience with dams is similar to experiences in other parts of the world – large dams are expensive (and frequently become more expensive than planned); they have devastating impacts on the environment ranging from greenhouse gas emissions to loss of extensive habitats and alteration of the hydrologic cycle, and they often require the forceful displacement of campesino or indigenous communities who not only lose their homes, but also their livelihoods, traditions and support systems. These impacts are also felt by downstream communities. While people there may not lose their homes, they certainly see their lives changed. Moreover, in Mexico there is a clear record of experience when it comes to compensation – communities are never fully paid for their losses and years after the dams are complete, relocated communities still lack the most basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity. Displaced and affected communities are left poorer after these “development” projects happen. A
clear example of this is the experience of the indigenous Chinantecos displaced by the Cerro de Oro dam more than 40 years ago. To date, the majority of people displaced lack access to water, sanitation, reliable electricity and other public services despite the promises of past governments.2

In fact, one of the most terrible traits of how public officials promoting dam projects operate is the lack of honesty and outright lies told to communities. Direct accounts of those affected by dams show this as a trend (MAPDER, 2008). For example, public officials will promise displaced families that they will have a house just like the one they will lose, yet the new houses are generally very small and nothing compared to what people had managed to build themselves through the years. This is the case for those displaced by the Picachos Dam and El Cajón Dam, where people also lost their lands and fruit trees and are no longer able to farm.3 Another clear lie is the promise to the town of Temacapulín to move the community basilica, which is more than 250 years-old, stone-by-stone, to the new relocation settlement. There are no previous experiences in relocations of something similar happening, and public servants during informal discussions admit it is technically unfeasible.

The Arcediano Dam exemplifies the terrible madness a dam project can be. Arcediano Dam was intended to provide water to Guadalajara, the second largest city in Mexico. However, one of the two rivers that was intended to fill the reservoir is massively polluted. The El Salto and Juancatlán communities living near this river suffer from skin and respiratory diseases, renal dysfunction and cancer-related to the toxic gasses coming from the river. Academics and civil society organizations strongly opposed the project, but the entire community – with the exception of one person – was evicted in a fortnight. The person that would not sell her property eventually had to leave for security reasons and, although her home was legally protected, one night it was demolished. In the end, the project was cancelled before construction started, allegedly because of unforeseen construction difficulties that would have increased the project’s cost dramatically. Expenses for this embarrassing and disgraceful project still remain to be justified.

Yet another serious problem with dams in Mexico is the violence and criminalization against those who oppose the projects. Opponents to La Parota Dam in Guerrero were held at gunpoint when they tried to participate in a public assembly about the project. For the El Naranjal Dam project, people approached landowners, threatening that those unwilling to sell their lands would “disappear.”(MAPDER, 2008)

Temacapulín, like many other towns that have struggled to stop a dam project, has managed to win some legal battles, but in a place like Mexico, wining a court battle is not enough. Unfortunately, the money for a project like this ($1 billion USD is the estimated investment for the El Zapotillo Dam), and the political interests at play, make it very difficult to stop.4

However, MAPDER has managed to support community-based struggles for many dam projects in Mexico. This movement has created awareness among the population to counter the official discourse that “dams are development.” MAPDER has facilitated dialogue between academics, experts and human rights activists to strengthen arguments that demonstrate that dams actually create more social and environmental problems than benefits.

The water and climate crises urgently require a different approach. Poor communities also require a different model that places local needs ahead of huge investments that generally result in wealth for a few and losses for the environment and for local communities.

2 Dictamen final “Pre-audiencia sobre Presas, Derechos de los Pueblos e Impunidad. Mesa de devastación ambiental y derechos de los pueblos. Capítulo Mexicano del Tribunal Permanente de los Pueblos” December, 2012.
4 Since this report was written, the elected governor of Jalisco announced by twitter that “Temacapulín would not be drowned.” The concrete proposal of how this would happen and the formal announcement has not happened. The Zapotillo Dam continues to be under construction. An outstanding question is if, in this new proposal, Acasico and Palmarejo would also be saved.
Resisting the Mythical Pursuit of Development: Anti-dam movements in India
By Vimal Bhai and Madhuresh Kumar

About the Authors

Vimal Bhai is an anti-dam activist who has worked for two decades in Uttrakhand, India. He is the convener of Matu Jan Sangathan, and National Organiser, with the National Alliance of People’s Movements. bhaivimal@gmail.com

Madhuresh Kumar is a National Organiser with the National Alliance of People’s Movements and a Blue Planet Project Organizer. madhuresh@napm-india.org

“The Bhakra Nangal project is something tremendous, something stupendous, something which shakes you up when you see it, the new temple of resurgent India, is the symbol of India’s progress.”

– Pandit Jawaharal Nehru, during the dedication of the Bhakra Dam to the nation
October 22, 1963.

“You people might not have seen the Narmada Valley. You do not know our ways of surviving, our lifestyle, etc. There is no need for electricity in our lifestyle. We are living a rich life. Yet the government is building a huge dam to generate electricity by making us landless. There is the river Yamuna in Delhi. Why don’t you build the dam on it to produce electricity and submerge Delhi? Are our rights very different than the rights of people in Delhi?”

– Bawa Mahariya, an adivasi oustee of the Sardar Sarovar Project on Narmada River

India’s first Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, considered dams to be the “modern temples of India,” and part of the building of “Modern India” post 1947. For more than 60 years after the construction of the dams, third generation oustees of the Bhakra dam are struggling to get restitution and proper resettlement and rehabilitation. This says a lot about the dam building industry in this country and the trajectory of unjust development.

According to the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) and other sources, in India, 5,500 big dams built since independence have together displaced an estimated 55 million people and submerged 44,00,000 hectares of land. Nearly 47 per cent of people displaced by these dams are adivasis (Indigenous people).

Despite having invested 200,000 million Rupees in these projects, electricity and irrigation facilities continue to be dismal in the country. Nearly 30 per cent of the electricity produced gets lost through transmission and distribution. Dams have only contributed to a marginal 10 per cent increase in the food production, an equal amount gets eaten by rodents, and another 20 per cent gets destroyed due to poor storage and warehousing facilities. Dams also contribute 45.8 million tonnes of CO2 and are a major contributor to climate change today. On the question of employment arising out of dams, the situation is equally dismal. Adivasis displaced by the Damodar Valley Corporation, primarily a hydroelectric project, have been agitating for their rightful share in jobs for more than 60 years now. ¹ The government cannot

¹ DVC Displaced get More Promises Nothing Concrete, Dharna Continues. http://napm-india.org/node/509
provide comprehensive data showing any percentage of increase in employment opportunities due to dams or irrigated lands, while there are sufficient estimates that show the amount of land submerged, people displaced, or employment and livelihoods lost because of dams.

The history of the dam building industry in India is replete with instances of resistance by communities. The first recorded history of an anti-dam movement is the movement against Mulshi Dam near Pune, which was built by Tata Power Company, led by Senapati Bapat, a socialist and nationalist in 1920s. Although Mulshi Dam was finally completed in 1927, it set the stage for future dam oppositions. Today, there is active resistance to dam projects in the Narmada Valley, Brahmaputra Valley in North East, in Andhra Pradesh against the Polavaram dam, various dams on Ganges in Uttarakhand, Damodar Valley and in other river valleys across the country. These protests are not only against people’s displacements, but they are rallying for preserving India’s larger cultural identity as expressed by Bawa Mahariya in the opening paragraphs of this paper. Mahariya, along with many others, has been fighting under the banner of Narmada Bachao Andolan across the Narmada Valley for nearly three decades now.

Dams are not about development

“Vikas Chahiye Vinash Nahi (We want development not destruction)” is one of the many slogans often shouted by the communities fighting against the destructive projects being implemented in the name of larger interest and public purpose. Narmada Bachao Andolan challenged this by linking their opposition to the Sardar Sarovar Dam with the question of development itself by asking “of what kind, for whom, by whom and how?”

The myth of dams being synonymous with progressive development stands exposed today, even as the pro-dam lobby of politicians, companies, contractors and middleman who benefit financially from dam construction continue to push them as “green energy.” In their view, the resulting environmental and resettlement and rehabilitation problems are minor issues compared to the larger “benefits” of building dams.

Along with the leadership of the committed activists, a group of scientists, engineers, researchers, lawyers, journalists and bureaucrats have also joined the cause of anti-dam groups. In 1999 the essay “The Greater Common Good” by Arundhati Roy shook the beliefs of even the Supreme Court of India. She then appealed to writers, journalists, intellectuals and environmentalists from across the world who converged for “Rally for the Valley” in July 1999, visiting the villages and bearing witness to the struggle in Narmada Valley. By bringing the focus back on big dams, she gave a large push to the dam versus development debate.

In India, a great deal of the scientific and research material on the economic, social, political and environmental impacts of dams is now available in the public domain. Studies on pre and post-dam construction and other such impacts are also available. The materials have contributed to the strengthening of the anti-dam movements. The anti-dam movement has come a long way – from appeals and prayers for resettlement and rehabilitation, to militant direct action demanding demolition of the dams, stopping work, targeting finances, challenging the planning processes, and claiming a greater share in the supposed “benefits” of dams for those sacrificing their land and livelihoods. The agitations over the years have prompted significant legal changes nationally and internationally.
Direct militant action

One of the modern temples of India, the Bhakra Nangal Dam, is today filled with sand and silt. The displaced population, which made way for the dam, has grouped together to demand justice and their share in the supposed development for which their parents and grandparents made immense sacrifices. From appeals and prayers in 1960, to forceful demands in 2012, the anti-dam movement in Bhakra Nangal has come a long way. To date, no official or minister is ready to have an open debate on the issue of dams. From the adivasis in hinterland, to farmers in the submergence zone, many are shouting “Zameen do nahi to bandh khali karo (Give us the land or empty the dam!”

In recent years, the situation has changed dramatically. Central and State governments and dam building companies can no longer proceed without scrutiny. The proclaimed development “benefits” of big dams have been completely exposed by the vibrant and militant anti-dam movements. In July 2012, project affected families (PAFs) of Omkareshwar Dam on the Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh and of Wang Marathwadi Dam on the Wang River in Maharashtra started Jal Satyagraha (demanding their due rights by staying put in water). The Madhya Pradesh government had to accept the demands of those who had been forced from their lands, and in response, constituted a three member ministerial committee.

In Wang Marathwadi, the Maharashtra government agreed to open the gates of the dam and reduce the water level to stop the flooding of people’s homes. In the case of the famous Saradar Sarovar Dam, where Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA/Save Narmada Movement) has been fighting against it for 27 years now, the gates of the dam have not yet been installed because authorities have failed to implement environmental and resettlement and rehabilitation obligations as required by law. There has been stiff opposition from the NBA on the ground, which has continued all the way to the Supreme Court of India. On many occasions, due to opposition from the NBA, Omkareshwar and Narmada Sagar reservoirs had to be emptied to prevent submergence.

In another famous case of the Tehri Dam on Bhagirathi River in Uttarakhand, the reservoir has never been filled despite all of the work being completed in 2006. India’s Supreme Court has ordered the dam companies to complete resettlement and rehabilitation before the reservoir can be filled based on a petition from PAFs. The slogan “Doobenge Par Hatenge Nahi (We shall drown, but we shall not move)” has come to symbolise the resistance of communities in the submergence zone who refuse to leave without proper resettlement and rehabilitation.

Pushing the environmental legal framework

In the mid-1980s, when environmentalism was taking roots in various spheres of society and governance, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) was established in India. Even then, due to opposition from people’s movements, environmental impact assessment committees were set up for the proposed Tehri Dam in Uttarakhand, the Lalpur Dam in Maharashtra, and the Silent Valley project in Kerala. Recommendations from these committees led to the scrapping of Silent Valley project, and in other cases, findings helped the anti-dam movements, like in case of the Tehri Dam.

People affected, or about to be affected by dams are ready to oppose and fight them at every stage today. Governments, dam building companies, financial institutions and others have been forced to follow environmental and resettlement and rehabilitation policies, guidelines and laws which have emerged out of people’s struggles over the years. Before construction can commence, companies have to seek numerous clearances from various ministries and authorities, conduct social and environmental impact assessments, present the information in public hearings, and so on. At public hearings, people have challenged

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6 See news on Narmada Jal Satyagraha here [http://tinyurl.com/d6n33ud](http://tinyurl.com/d6n33ud)
7 See news on Wang Marathwadi Jal Satyagraha here [http://tinyurl.com/d3b82h5](http://tinyurl.com/d3b82h5)
8 See [http://matuganga.blogspot.in/2012/01/duu-63-supreme-court-tehri-dam-case-30.html](http://matuganga.blogspot.in/2012/01/duu-63-supreme-court-tehri-dam-case-30.html)
the exaggerated benefit claims for dams and challenged cancellations and disruptions of these public hearings. The government has tried to weaken the provisions of public hearings, attempting to make them a mere formality. However, disrupting or canceling a public hearing is not considered wrong any more, since they are carried flouting all norms. The government is now forced to publicly deliver all of the project-related documents. It can no longer hide behind the rhetoric of “dams means development” and silence critics. Factual critiques are being offered by movements today, to which the government and companies have no answers. “Hamaare Gaon me Hamaara Raj (Our rule in our villages)” is the guiding sentiment now given the completely undemocratic planning of many of these infrastructure projects.

If earlier people were pleading for money or relief, now governments at union or state levels have faced stiff opposition, with concerned ministers at times being barricaded and forced to accept the demands of the people. It is now mandatory to seek environmental and forest clearance from the MoEF. Even these have been challenged at various stages, and as a result, many project clearances have been annulled. Even courts have been forced to reconsider their opinion on dams as means of development. Anti-dam movements have stopped the arbitrariness of the government and dam construction companies. There is hardly any dam project today that has not faced challenge from village level to Supreme Court. The newly instituted National Green Tribunal, where all environmental cases are being heard, has also come into existence due to the efforts of anti-dam movements.

The sacrifices of millions of Indians who gave their land, houses and livelihoods and suffered in the national interest will only be recorded as footnotes in the history of development of this country. Their pain and suffering will be forgotten in the governments’ project files. This is evident from the stories of displaced populations in numerous development projects, given that out of a total of nearly 1 billion displaced people, a marginal 17 per cent have received some form of resettlement and rehabilitation. It is only the sheer resolve of displaced people to build lives despite all of the adversity, and their spirit of struggle to keep pushing for better rehabilitation measures, that things have improved. The struggles of displaced people in Narmada, Koel Karo, Tehri, Rengali, Tawa, Indira Sagar, Omkareshwar, Maheshwar and elsewhere in the country has gone a long way in deepening the development discourse. It has also contributed to the expansion of democratic norms and ethos in the country. Their struggles are shaping legislation at the central level under the title of “Right to Fair Compensation, Transparency in Acquisition and Resettlement and Rehabilitation Bill 2012.” The Bill is not the perfect solution and may facilitate further displacement, but it will give legal entitlements to the displaced people – something that existed only as a policy to date.

**Resistance in the Himalayan Region**

For the past decade, a series of dams on local rivers have been proposed by governments in ten Himalayan States. The proposed dams are being sold by state governments as projects that will provide employment and 12 per cent free electricity to the State. Even then, a number of anti-dam struggles have taken shape. In December 2011 in Assam, Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (Freedom for Peasants Struggle Committee) and other community organisations mobilised farmers, peasants and others that would be affected by the Lower Subansiri Dam on the Brahmaputra River and stopped the company from carrying dam building equipments to the site. They held their ground despite harsh weather and repression from the State that included beatings, jail, police violence and so on. In the Jongu region of Sikkim, Lepcha adivasis fought hard, undertook long hunger strikes, to save the ecosystem from destruction by proposed dams. As a result, four out of five hydroelectric projects (HEP) on the Teesta River were cancelled. Similarly, the MoEF, under pressure from different groups concerned with environmental conservation, put a halt to six HEPs together producing nearly 1047 MW. Similarly, 10 HEPs in Himachal Pradesh were

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10 See http://intercontinentalcry.org/43-lepchas-arrested-after-dam-site-agitation/
11 See http://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/teesta-river
stopped to conserve the trout fish population in the Tirthan River. In Rajasthan, at the Chambal National Crocodile Sanctuary, a proposed dam threatening to submerge the forest land was also scrapped after protests. In Uttarakhand, three HEPs on the Ganges River were completely cancelled. Courts have also annulled the environmental or forest clearance of many other projects. In Pindar Valley in Uttarakhand, the Devsari Dam hasn’t been given clearance because of constant opposition from people for many years now. The list goes on.

In the plains there has been opposition to dams and demands to dismantle dams for decades. Maharashtra, home to more than 1,000 dams, was faced with the question of displacement and resettlement of the population even before independence. The failure of governments to provide adequate resettlement and rehabilitation has given another tool to people to fight the new dams and discredit the governments’ claims. The situation is the same everywhere. In Jharkhand, erstwhile part of Bihar, the Koel Karo Dam has been stopped by adivasis. This situation is the same for other dams in Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, where we have many ongoing anti-dam struggles.

**Beyond India: Targeting finances and the World Commission on Dams**

Internationally, financial institutions and companies manufacturing dam machinery or providing securities and guarantees for loans for dams in India have been on the receiving end of opposition by the people’s movements. In 1992, the World Bank, for the first time in its history, had to withdraw financing from the *Sardar Sarovar Project* after fierce resistance from Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA/the Save Narmada Movement). In fact, World Bank’s inspection panel and resettlement and rehabilitation guidelines are a result of the engagement in the Sardar Sarovar Project.\(^\text{12}\)

The German government, which financially guaranteed the proposed construction of the Maheshwar Dam on the Narmada River, faced severe criticism and opposition. As a result, an international panel was formed to address questions raised by the NBA, finally leading to the withdrawal of the guarantees in 1999.\(^\text{13}\)

In 2000, when the U.S. President visited India with a big business delegation, NBA mobilised people affected by the Maheshwar Dam and other dams and held a protest at the American embassy. Pacgen, Ogden and three other American companies had to withdraw from the Maheshwar project. Many banks also faced opposition, leading to their withdrawals from the project.

India’s anti-dam struggles have given momentum to international struggles too. In 1998, the World Commission on Dams (WCD), representing stakeholders from around the world, was formed under the Chairmanship of South Africa’s then Water Resource Minister. Shri L. C. Jain, an economist and member of the Planning Commission of India, served as the commission’s vice chairperson. Medha Patkar of the NBA also served as a member of the commission. The WCD benefitted from the immense experience of the NBA’s work against the Sardar Sarovar Project since 1986. It also needs to be noted that since Medha Patkar was a member, the WCD was not allowed to hold hearings in Gujarat. In fact, the Gujarat Legislative Assembly convened a special session to pass a resolution against the WCD having hearings in the Sardar Sarovar Project’s region. The Government of India did not allow the WCD to conduct hearings across India, citing protocol issues. However, the report submitted to the WCD titled, “Big Dams: Indian Experience” exposed the Indian government completely.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^\text{12}\) See http://www.ieo.org/world-c13-p2.html
\(^\text{13}\) See http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1715/17151150.htm
\(^\text{14}\) See http://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/the-world-commission-on-dams
Future Challenges
As people's movements continue to gain victories by forcing some dam projects to be cancelled, or halted or delayed, the challenges continue to grow with new proposals and the weakening of legislative frameworks and environmental guidelines. We need to remember that despite the strong opposition and successes of the anti-dam struggle, the pro-dam lobby has been proactively pushing their agenda. The pro-dam lobby continues to deny studies citing environmental and resettlement problems, exhibit rampant corruption, promote state repression, use propaganda to promote development, take advantage of courts' biases, and spread misinformation about activists and people's movements. All of these actions remain significant challenges for the anti-dam movements.

Another big challenge is the proposed interlinking of rivers project. This massive project, which is expected to cost 560,000 million Rupees, proposes to link all of India's rivers. These dams are envisioned to solve the flood and drought situation in the country. However, given the scant regard to any comprehensive environmental impact assessment of a project of this scale, the whole project is not only an environmental disaster, but will also be a minefield of corruption. Given past experiences, it will prove to be a money-making venture for the politicians, bureaucrats and industries involved. Negating the lessons of history, the river-linking project is only going to invite more problems for India and its people.

Pressure from people's movements has, on one hand, forced governments to enact progressive legislations. Unfortunately it is these same authorities that must implement these legislations, which has not happened. Some of these agencies don't have the required staff to even monitor their own clearance conditions for projects. People's movements have been exposing these violations. Even then, to get any punitive action remains a struggle and a challenge. Dam building companies don't often follow these orders. For example, the GVK company involved in the Srinagar HEP in Uttarakhand refused to act on a July 2012 court order to open the dam gates so that the flooding in the backwater reservoir area could be avoided. Government also didn't take any action on this.

Still, India's anti-dam and people's movements are strong and are committed to making dams a part of history rather than a part of India's future.