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## **How Not to Do It : River-Basin Development in Ethiopia's Omo Valley**

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### **The Gibe III Dam**

The River Omo, known as Gibe in its upper and middle basins, rises in the western highlands of Ethiopia and ends in Lake Turkana, the world's largest desert lake which lies wholly within Kenya. The Gibe III dam, now under construction in the middle basin of the Omo-Gibe, will be the tallest dam in Africa and will double Ethiopia's electricity generating capacity. But while it will have a relatively small impact on the population of the reservoir area, it will have a potentially devastating impact on the 90,000 or so mainly agro-pastoral population of the flood plain. This is because, by regulating the flow of the river, it will eliminate the annual flood and make possible large-scale commercial irrigation schemes in the lower basin.

### **The Elimination of the Flood**

All the residents of the lower Omo depend on flood-retreat or recession agriculture. Those who live in the more arid southern part of the lower basin also depend on the flood for the annual rejuvenation of their dry-season pastures. These facts were ignored by the original environmental impact assessment (EIA)<sup>2</sup>, which was completed in 2006, the year dam construction began. Two years later, after much criticism from campaigning organisations and, no doubt, with the loan conditions of the development banks very much in mind, a revised 'Economic and Social Impact Assessment' (ESIA)<sup>3</sup> was produced, together with an 'Additional study'<sup>4</sup> devoted to downstream impacts.

It was now proposed to release an annual 'controlled flood' from the dam reservoir, which would fully compensate for the loss of the natural flood and be the centre-piece of a new 'downstream mitigation plan'. The likely effectiveness of the controlled flood, however, was quickly and comprehensively demolished in an independent review of the Gibe III project

commissioned by the European Investment Bank (EIB). This concluded that the controlled flood had been planned without a proper study of the problem it was intended to solve, that information needed to design an effective downstream mitigation plan was 'still dramatically missing' and that a number of further studies were needed to fill the gaps.<sup>5</sup> Following the decision of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, in July 2010, to make a loan of 450,000 USD to the project, the EIB decided against making a loan itself and the recommended further studies were not carried out.

In the same month that the SOGREAH review was completed, it slipped out in a press release issued by the construction company that the controlled flood would not in fact be a permanent measure but would be withdrawn 'when deemed appropriate'.<sup>6</sup> One could almost hear the cat being let out of the bag. The temporary nature of the controlled flood has never, to my knowledge, been officially confirmed by the Gibe III project office. But it was verbally confirmed to me during a meeting with the Minister of Water and Energy in Addis Ababa in December 2010.

The Gibe III project is a striking illustration of the willingness of the Ethiopian government to bypass international norms (and even national laws) designed to protect people and the environment, in pursuit of the rapid expansion of the country's hydropower sector. The official justification for this is that Ethiopia cannot afford to be held back in its fight against poverty by what the Chief Executive of the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation called, in a BBC interview, 'luxurious preconditions'.<sup>7</sup> Most readers of this Newsletter will find this a chilling pronouncement.

### **Large-scale Irrigation Development**

Just as the original (2006) EIA ignored

the vital importance of the flood for downstream livelihoods, so the revised (2009) ESIA did not consider the potential downstream impact of large-scale irrigation schemes. And yet in January 2011 the Prime Minister went to Jinka, capital of the South Omo Zone, to announce that the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation would soon begin clearing 150,000 ha of forest and grassland in the Lower Omo for irrigated sugar plantations.<sup>8</sup> The planning for this project has been entirely top-down and its implementation surrounded by a wall of secrecy. Strenuous efforts have been made, with the help of police and military units, to persuade local agro-pastoralists to give up their best agricultural land, divest themselves of their cattle and move 'voluntarily' into permanent resettlement sites. No feasibility studies, impact assessments or resettlement plans have been made available for public discussion and consultation.

Nor did the impact assessments commissioned by the dam builders consider the effect of large-scale irrigation on the level of Lake Turkana, which receives 90 per cent of its water from the Omo. A calculation was made, however, in a report commissioned by the African Development Bank. Here it was estimated that a prospective irrigated area of 150,000 ha in the Lower Omo could lead to a drop in lake level of 20m, and that this would halve the lake's volume and double its salinity.<sup>9</sup> Such a drastic drop in lake level would affect the livelihoods of around 300,000 people who live in northern Kenya and depend on the lake for pastoralism and fishing.

Irrigation development in the lower Omo, then, is being pursued with the same disregard for so-called 'luxurious preconditions' that has been such a prominent feature of the Gibe III project itself. We can get some idea of what this will mean for the people of the Lower Omo

from studies of another Ethiopian river valley, the Awash Valley of eastern Ethiopia, which currently ranks as the country's biggest irrigation complex. Here, the forced displacement of pastoralists from their land and watering points by sugar plantations has led to land degradation, inter-group conflict and drought. Meanwhile, employment on sugar estates has been monopolised by migrant workers from the highlands and settlement schemes for pastoralists have benefited only a handful of rich pastoralists. These results could have been avoided, the same studies tell us, if the affected people had been fully informed, fully consulted and fully involved in the planning process from the start lessons which have clearly not been learnt by those planning sugar plantations in the Lower Omo.<sup>10</sup>

### Action Needed before It is Too Late

It is far from unheard of for a well intentioned scheme to improve the human condition to end in tragic consequences for those whom it was intended to help. This is all the more likely when, as in this case, a government is determined to push through its plans, with 'an authoritarian disregard for the values, desires and objections' of its citizens and in the absence of a functioning civil society.<sup>11</sup> But it still seems worthwhile to ask what could be done, even at this late stage, to stop a predictable disaster occurring in the Lower Omo over the next few years. Here are two obvious immediate steps.

First, the additional investigations recommended by the SOGREAH review should be completed as soon as possible. This would provide the essential baseline data needed to design a livelihood

reconstruction and development plan for the downstream population. Second, the commercial plantations and accompanying resettlement should be put on hold to allow a proper process of public discussion and consultation to take place, before any plans are finalised. If it is concluded that the resettlement of local people cannot be avoided, a detailed and fully costed compensation and resettlement plan should be prepared, in consultation with the resettlers.

The argument for taking these steps is fundamentally a moral one: the people who will carry the main burden of this project, on behalf of the nation at large, should be amongst the first to benefit from it. But there is also a pragmatic argument. The Ethiopian government appears to be staking its political future on the achievement of highly ambitious economic growth targets, based largely on a rapid expansion of the country's hydropower sector. It will not help to achieve these plans if Gibe III, Africa's tallest dam, becomes a 'disgracing stain on development itself'.<sup>12</sup> Nor will it help if the Lower Omo, famous today as the oldest landscape in the world known to have been inhabited by modern humans, becomes infamous tomorrow as a text-book example of how not to do river-basin development.

### Notes and References

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<sup>2</sup>CESI (Centro Elettrotecnico Sperimentale Italiano), Gibe III hydroelectric project: environmental impact assessment. Milan, 2006.

<sup>3</sup>CESI & Mid-Day International Consulting Engineers. Gibe III hydroelectric project: environmental and social impact assessment. Milan, 2009.

<sup>4</sup>Agriconsulting S.p.A and Mid-Day International Consulting Engineers. Gibe III hydroelectric project environmental and social impact assessment: additional study on downstream impacts, 2009.

<sup>5</sup>SOGREAH. Independent review and studies regarding the environmental and social impact assessments for the Gibe 3 hydroelectric project, final report. Echirrolles, France, 2010, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup>Salini Costruttori S.p.A Gibe 3: the Survival figures are obviously incorrect, 30 March 2010. <http://salinicostruisce.salini.it/2010/03/30/gibe-iii-the-survival-figures-are-obviously-incorrect/> (accessed 11/1/12).

<sup>7</sup>Peter Greste, Power Rules, BBC News, 2009.

<sup>8</sup>For an English translation of the PM's speech, go to <http://www.mursi.org/news-items/huge-irrigation-scheme-planned-for-the-lower-omo-valley> It was later announced in the Addis press that a total of 250,000 ha in the Lower Omo had been allocated to the Sugar Corporation.

<sup>9</sup>Avery, S. Hydrological impacts of Ethiopia's Omo Basin on Kenya's Lake Turkana water levels and fisheries, Prepared for the African Development Bank, Tunis. Nairobi, 2010. <http://www.mursi.org/pdf/Avery%20final%20report.pdf> (accessed 30/1/12). This report was completed before the full extent of planned irrigation in the Lower Omo was known.

<sup>10</sup>Kloos, H. Development, drought, and famine in the Awash Valley of Ethiopia, *African Studies Review* 25 (4): 21-48, 1982. Ayelew Gebre and Getachew Kassa, The effects of development projects on the Karrayu and Afar in the mid-Awash Valley, in Alula Pankhurst and Francois Piguet (eds.) *Moving people in Ethiopia: development, displacement and the state*, Oxford: James Currey, 2009. Kloos, H., W. Legesse, S. McFeeters and D. Turton. Problems for pastoralists in the lowlands: river basin development in the Awash and Omo valleys. *Water resources management in Ethiopia: implications for the Nile basin*. H. Kloos and W. Legesse (eds.). Amherst, New York, Cambria Press, 2010.

<sup>11</sup>Scott, J. C. Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 4-7.

<sup>12</sup>Cernea, M., Reforming the foundations of involuntary resettlement: introduction, in M. Cernea and H.M Mathur (eds.) *Can compensation prevent impoverishment? Reforming resettlement through investment and benefit-sharing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 1.

## Laos Postpones the Xayaburi Hydropower Project on the Mekong River Hillary Clinton on Dams and Development

Speaking at U.S-Lower Mekong Ministerial Meeting held at Bali International Convention Center, Bali, Indonesia on 22 July 2011, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, emphasized the need for a better prior assessment of the likely consequences of dams on environment and communities. The following are highlights from her remarks:

"On infrastructure, the United States was pleased to participate in an exchange between delegates from the Mekong River

Commission and the Mississippi River Commission to share best practices and technical knowhow to ensure that future infrastructure projects are designed with a consideration of their social and environmental impact.

"There's just one issue I want to mention briefly before concluding, and that is \*the very serious question of new dams on the main Mekong stem. This is a serious issue for all the countries that share the Mekong River, because if any country

builds a dam, all countries will feel the consequences in terms of environmental degradation, challenges to food security, and impacts on communities. I want to urge all parties to pause on any considerations to build new dams until we are all able to do a better assessment of the likely consequences."

**Source :** From Michael Cernea's e-mail to Hari Mohan Mathur, Editor, Resettlement News, dated 30 July 2011

### *A Huge Victory in the Long Fight*

## **The UN acts to Halt Proposed Phulbari Coal Project in Bangladesh**

The IAP team is celebrating a huge victory in the long fight to halt GCM's proposed Phulbari Coal Mine in northwest Bangladesh today, and I wanted to be sure you all got the fabulous news. Today, seven United Nations Special Rapporteurs issued a press release calling for an immediate halt to the project due to the many human rights risks and violations it poses. Whoohoo!!!

This press release is the culmination of work begun last year when IAP

submitted an urgent appeal for action to halt this project to ten UN Special Rapporteurs in November, 2011. Since that time, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Oliver de Shutter, has been coordinating work on our appeal. Thanks to the sustained efforts of Nadia Lambek, the attorney in de Shutter's office who has been the lead in this work, seven rapporteurs came together to issue this coordinated response today.

We are circulating as widely as

possible and drawing on all social media to give this the greatest possible visibility and will very much appreciate if you would lend your support to that effort by forwarding to your networks with request that they do the same. Thanks! Further information from: Web: <http://www.accountabilityproject.org/>

**Source:** E-mail from the International Accountability Project forwarded to the Editor, Resettlement News by Ted Downing, President International Network on Displacement and Resettlement (INDR) on 28 February 2012

### *Better standards for Smarter Growth*

## **IFC's Updated Sustainability Framework 2012**

The Sustainability Framework, which became effective from 1 January 2012, articulates IFC's strategic commitment to sustainable development and is an integral part of its approach to risk management. Originally adopted in 2006, the framework was updated in 2011 to incorporate valuable lessons from IFC's implementation experience and feedback from its stakeholders and clients.

The updated framework clarifies

approaches that have become recognized as good practice in recent years. It helps protect people and the environment, promotes transparency and accountability, and support IFC's clients in managing risks and doing business in a sustainable way.

The Sustainability Framework consists of

- The Policy on Environment and Social Sustainability, which defines IFC's commitment to environmental and

social sustainability

- The Performance Standards, which define clients' responsibilities for managing their environment and social risks
- The Access to Information Policy, which articulates IFC's commitment to transparency

IFC's updated framework is available at [www.ifc.org/sustainabilityframework](http://www.ifc.org/sustainabilityframework)

## **FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES**

### *Development-Induced Displacement: Addressing Conflict and Impoverishment*

## **International Geographers' Congress, Cologne, Germany, 26-30 August 2012**

'Development-Induced Displacement: Addressing Conflict and Impoverishment' will be a key topic session at the 32nd International Geographical Congress (IGC) which is scheduled to take place in Cologne, Germany, 26-30 August 2012.

While development projects promise economic booms for the nation, for industry, and the middle class, the greatest negative

impacts are felt by already marginalized local communities, with many suffering at least short-term impoverishment. The panel will discuss the implications of displacement for affected residents and host communities, including policy-implementation gaps, conflict generation and community and individual resilience. Land-grabbing and land acquisition in Asia

and Africa, dam-induced resettlement, and urban development-induced displacement will be among the topics presented.

The session will be chaired by Professors Jane Singer and Andreas Neef of the Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, Kyoto University. For more information, please see <https://igc2012.org/frontend/index.php>.

### *Development Projects and Displaced People*

## **International Conference on Resettlement, Bhubaneswar, 10-12 April 2012**

The Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar, will host an International Conference on Resettlement, on its campus in Bhubaneswar, 10-12 April 2012. This is being jointly organized by the Xavier

Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar, the XLRI School of Business and Human Resources, Jamshedpur and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. The Conference will address the resettlement

issues with focus on special problems of vulnerable groups.

For further information log on to: <http://icrar2012.ximb.ac.in/>



## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### Displacement by Development: Ethics, Rights and Responsibilities

Edited by Peter Penz, Jay Drydyk and Pablo S Bose Cambridge University Press, New York 2011

For decades, policy-maker in government, development banks and foundations, NGOs, researchers and students have struggled with the problem of how to protect people who are displaced from their homes and livelihoods by development projects. This volume addresses these concerns and explores how debates often become deadlocked between

'managerial' and 'movement' perspectives. Using development ethics to determine the rights and responsibilities of various stakeholders, the authors find the displaced people must be empowered so as to share equitably in benefits rather than being victimized. They propose a governance model for development projects that would transform conflict over displacement into

a more manageable collective bargaining process and empower displaced people to achieve equitable results. This volume will be valuable for readers in a wide range of fields including ethics, development studies, politics and international relations, as well as policy-making, project management and community development.

### Uprooted for Whose Benefit? Development-Induced Displacement in Assam (1947-2000)

By Walter Fernandes and Gita Bharali Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre 2011

This book is the outcome of a study undertaken by the North East Social Research Centre (NESRC). It presents the data related to development-induced displacement in Assam over the period

1947-2000. Detailed information about the extent of land used and the number of persons deprived of sustenance by various projects is provided. Projects studied include dams, mines, industries, power,

transport and others. Researchers and others interested in this subject will find the book a veritable mine of data and information on development-induced displaced in India's northeast.

### Sharing the Water, Sharing the Benefits: Lessons from Six Large Dams in West Africa

Edited by Frédéric Bazin, Jamie Skinner, Jérôme Koundouno, IIED, London 2011

Over 150 large dams have been built in West Africa over the last 50 years. Many more are in the planning stages to meet the region's demands for energy, water and

food and their reservoirs will displace many thousands of local people. Success in resettling affected people and in rebuilding their livelihoods has been mixed in the

region. This publication reviews detailed experience from six dams in Burkina Faso,

Mali and Senegal through the lens of "benefit sharing" with local populations.

### Development and Dispossession in the Narmada Valley

Judith Whitehead New Delhi: Pearson 2010

Judith Whitehead talks about that aspect of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) that, though crucial, has not been fully appreciated the concept of 'accumulation by dispossession'. She argues that this is a core feature of any large-scale infrastructural and industrial project. Accumulation by dispossession is a Marxist concept that refers to the process by which assets or resources earlier held in common are privatized and transformed into commodities. This process leads to class polarization, as it creates a class of property owners and a class who have nothing left but their labour to sell. In this book, Whitehead recounts her experiences during her field research in the submerging

villages of Gujarat, and highlights the impact and extent of this aspect of the project.

Focusing exclusively on the later phases of the anti-dam movement and its decline and demise in Gujarat, Whitehead attempts to offer a retrospective analysis of the relations between the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), Gujarat civil society, displaced Adivasis in Gujarat, and the state government. Through her analysis, she hopes to provide an insight into what could have been done differently in the face of state repression, and at the same time suggest practical alternatives for such future movements in other parts of the subcontinent and the world.

### Right of Way: A Journey of Resettlement

By Sharni Jayawardena Colombo: Centre for Poverty Analysis 2011

This nicely produced, slim publication (72 pages) from Sri Lanka, looks at the process of resettlement that took place to make way for the ADB-funded Southern Transport Development Project (STDP). It records the journey of the communities that lost their homes and livelihoods and experienced changes to their living environments. It shows how the Road

Transport Authority, whose primary task was to supervise the road building, also implemented the project's social programmes, under difficult and contentious circumstances. Based on CEPA's work as independent external monitors of STDP, this publication attempts to share the story of this resettlement experience for the benefit of future projects.

**RESETTLEMENT News** published twice a year in January and July reports on current operational, research and capacity building work in resettlement from around the world. The aim is to disseminate practical experience, information and ideas among those working for resettlement agencies, development research centres, and management training institutes. It is published by the Resettlement News Network- an informal network of individuals with a concern for the fate of people who are forced to relocate due to development projects.

The submission of material relating to any aspect of development-induced resettlement is welcomed, and should be addressed to:

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