Call for papers1

Special issue: WCD+10: Revisiting the Large Dam Controversy

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Guest editors

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Large dams - over 15 m tall or with a capacity over 3 million m3- total roughly 50,000 worldwide, not considering millions of smaller dams and reservoirs. Few rivers remain that have been untouched by some type of dam. As stated by the World Commission on Dams (WCD) ten years ago, “Dams have made an important and significant contribution to human development, and the benefits derived from them have been considerable. In too many cases an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms, by people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers and by the natural environment.” The WCD – an independent, international commission comprised of leaders from all sides of the debate surrounding big dams – issued its report in 2000 with findings about the development effectiveness of large dams globally and proposed guidelines for improving dam performance and governance, including -among others- principles of participation, equity, transparency and comprehensive option assessment. Ten years later, this special issue of Water Alternatives will look at the influence and the impact of the WCD on dam construction and the practice of various main actors: financiers, construction companies, bureaucracies, developers or the civil society.

Despite the WCD process, the legacies and controversies of large dams remain: the conflict between providing hydropower, water supply, flood control, irrigation and other benefits to some while devastating the basic rights and livelihoods of others, and damaging shared rivers and ecosystems. Dams may control floods and regulate irregular water regimes, generate hydropower, provide storage for domestic, industrial or agricultural use, or allow the development of recreation. But these benefits are not well distributed socially, often favouring urban dwellers, industries and certain types of farmers disproportionally; and they come with large social and environmental costs that have long been overlooked. Displaced populations, totalling at least 60 million, have frequently been resettled with minimal or no compensation, often in marginal lands, and in the overwhelming majority have become and remained poorer. Large scale alteration of natural hydrologic regimes has had massive impacts on fisheries, water-based livelihoods, aquatic ecosystems and environmental services as a whole. Some scientists also believe that many dams generate large amounts of greenhouse gas, up to 5% of all human-induced GHG emissions. Civic movements emerged in the 1990s to protest the impacts of large scale dam projects and demand consultation and compensation. These movements and a number of national and international NGOs stalled a number of projects and prompted global efforts at improving dam project decision-making processes. Prominent among these efforts was the World Commission on Dams (WCD).

What has happened in the decade since the WCD report was published? While social and environmental costs and risks are better understood and dam construction has significantly slowed down in the past decade, several changes have recently emerged. Energy demand and the price of fossil fuel have prompted a renewed interest in hydropower; traditional development banks and developers have been increasingly challenged by competitors from emergent countries; while opponents have also become more sophisticated in their modes of action. An upsurge of dam projects has been witnessed during the past five years (but the recent global economic meltdown might temporarily reverse this trend). Does the governance of these projects show substantial progress compared with earlier decades? Has the performance of dams improved? Has the WCD instilled a new ethics and greater consideration of social and environmental impacts? What are the prospects for advancing in a debate that remains very polarized?

This special issue, targeted for the June 2010 issue of Water Alternatives, will include a number of articles, some written by authors chosen by the editors, others selected among proposals to a call for papers. The overarching questions we would like to explore in this issue are: What has changed in the dams and development arena in the last decade, and is the WCD still relevant?

While the call for papers is open to all relevant topics the following issues are suggested:

Generic issues

- Ten years later: what has the WCD changed?
- The WCD process and outcomes
- Follow up to the WCD and civil society-initiated national dialogues
- Trends in dam building worldwide: justifications, actors, governance, contestations
- Dams, resettlements and social risks
- Dams and the environment
- Dams and the special case of indigenous peoples
- Codes of conducts: financiers and developers
- Dams and development banks evolving policies
- Dams and climate change
- Dams, civil society, advocacy, democratization
- Experience with non-dam alternatives for water supply and management
- The performance of existing dams: has management been improved?
- The EU's Linking Directive and the WCD framework

Case studies

- Regional case studies (e.g. Mekong, Nile, etc)
- Comprehensive dam case studies
- Looking back at early dams (e.g. Assuan, Akosombo, Itaipu, etc)

Important dates

- Call for papers (detailed abstracts): May 2009
- End of call: 15 July 2009
- Final selection of abstracts: 30 July 2009
- Submission of final papers: 15 November 2009
- Review Process: until 15 February 2010
- Final selection and revisions: until 31 March 2010
- Editing/copyediting/formatting and publishing : 1 June 2010

Abstracts should preferably include between 250 and 500 words

Call for papers closed

Special issue: Hydraulic Bureaucracies: Flows of Water and Power

Since the 19th century large-scale water resource development has led to the extensive development of irrigation areas, supply of water to ever expanding megacities, and the construction of massive infrastructures for hydropower and flood control. But it has also been associated with an ideology of domination of nature by steel and concrete. In many countries this 'hydraulic mission' has been carried out by –and has also given rise to- powerful water bureaucracies that, often up to these days, have acquired and sustained enormous power. This power was bureaucratic, through the command of large budgets and the control of decision-making on what to build and where, but also expanded socially (i.e. the prestige attached to the engineering profession), politically (through close relationships between both local and national politicians and state bureaucrats), and economically (due to their proximity with construction companies and consulting firms, either

national or foreign). Relatively little scholarly work has investigated the role of these state water bureaucracies in the development of water resources, environmental transformations and state-citizen relationships, although exceptions include institutions like the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers, in the US. Many other countries like France, Spain, Netherlands, UK, Australia, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Japan, Mexico, Brazil, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, etc. have seen the emergence of powerful water bureaucracies. This special issue will include case studies from various countries that will emphasize the inner historical transformations and the role of these water bureaucracies in the transformation of landscapes, as well as in the formation of the state and wider social relationships.

Potential contributors interested in this topic can send an abstract to WaA before the 1st of March 2009. After selection of articles authors will be requested to send their articles before the 30th of May. Papers will be reviewed and published as a special issue in the WaA issue of October 1.

Call for papers closed