

China's New Role in Africa and the South
A search for a new perspective
May 15 -17, 2007
Shanghai, People's Republic of China

Civil Society Initiative in Africa
The Case of Merowe Dam: Sudan

By: Ali Askouri

Piankhi Research Group

The Project

- ❖ The Merowe Dam Project in Sudan is the largest hydropower project currently under construction in Africa.
- ❖ The dam is located on the River Nile Fourth cataracts in northern Sudan.



- ❖ According to the dam authority the project is expected to add 1250 MW to the country's national electrical grid.

Contractors

- ❖ The Dam is being implemented mainly by two Chinese Contractors:
 - 1) China International Water and Electric Company (CWE), and the China National Water Resources and Hydropower Engineering Corporation (CWHEC) a joint venture known as (CCMD).
The CCMD contract amounts to \$555 million.
 - 2) Harpin-Jilin, another Chinese joint venture building the power towers network.
Harpin-Jilin contract amounts to \$460 millions.
- ❖ The total cost of the Merowe Project is not known, however it is estimated to be \$1.966 billion.
- ❖ China Export Import Bank is the main foreign funder of the project, with a contribution of \$520 millions.

The affected communities

- ❖ The dam will displace more than 70,000 people mainly small farmers living on the banks of the River Nile.
- ❖ Generally speaking, the affected communities are not opposed to the project.
- ❖ The affected communities are:

☀ the Hamdab representing 8% of the total number of the affected people.

☀ Amri, representing 25 %.

☀ The Manasir, representing 67 %.



- ❖ Despite the fact that the affected communities represent one ethnic group living on the river banks, the dam authority decided to disperse them to four different desert locations hundreds miles away from each other.

- ❖ The Manasir, the largest affected group will be split up into two different locations at least 300 km away.



Al Multaga resettlement project

- ❖ To date, the Hamdab and half of Amri group have been moved .

Human Rights Violation

Since its start the project has been marred with massive human rights violations. To date, the project has massive unresolved social and environmental problems. As it currently stands, the project violates Sudanese law, and a series of internationally recognized social and environmental standards. International renowned experts who visited the projects in 2005 reported that the project violates the World Bank guidelines on at least 63 counts.

As with regard to the rights of the affected communities, repression and violence have been the norm.

❖ On Sept. 30th, a group of men, women and children of Korgheli village organized a demonstration around the dam site protesting their displacement. The police ruthlessly attacked them using live bullets, tear gas and plastic rods. Three men were shot, severely injured. A number of women were injured in the scuffles with the police.



Colonel (Retired) Altayeb Mohammed Altayeb (President of the union of the affected people) and Mr. Abdel Mutalab Tai Allha (Union deputy President) were both arrested on site and taken to Kober prison where they were detained for a month and were subjected to torture and abuse.

- ❖ 2. On Dec 1, the police again attacked the people of Korgheli village who refused to move and chose to stay in the ruins of their village. The attacking police force dispersed the villagers and eventually closed down the primary school and the health centre to force the people to move from their demolished houses.
- ❖ In December 2004 the dam security unit arrested four members of the Manasir Committee. The four remained in detention for seven months and later released without charges in June 2005.

- ❖ In November 2005, the Chinese contractors building the power towers network occupied water wells in the Bayouda desert and prevented the Manasir nomads from accessing the water. The Chinese contractors said they want water for the project building components and for their own domestic uses.
- ❖ On 22nd of April 2006, the dam militia armed with machine guns and heavy artillery attacked Amri people who were meeting in the local school courtyard. The attacking militia opened fire on the people without warning, killing three on the spot and injuring more than forty.
- ❖ In August 2006, the houses and properties of more than 2000 families in Amri were flooded without warning. The dam authority cordoned the area refusing access to the media and relief aid. The aim was to force these families to go to the desert where the dam authority has built few houses.

❖ Journalists who managed to visit the resettlement projects reported that an average of five families live in a two bedroom house. An estimated 800 families have no houses and no farms and are living in open air. Some families are building their own houses.



❖ On 29/03 the dam security arrested six of the Manasir Committee leaders and detained them for no clear reasons. They still remain in detention without charge.



The Affected Communities and INGOs Contact with China

- ❖ Despite the fact that the affected communities and international INGOs have written to the China Exim Bank and other authorities since 2004 regarding the plight of the communities, to date no reply has been received.
- ❖ Last year the Chief Executive of China Exim bank promised to send an investigation team from the bank to investigate the shooting incidence in Amri, there is nothing to show that that promise has been fulfilled.
- ❖ To date, there is no report from the Exim bank to show their position on the shooting and killings of affected communities.
- ❖ indeed, such uncooperative position makes dialogue with Chinese institutions impossible. It also hints that Chinese institutions and officials are not interested in dialogue.



Conclusion

- ❖ Merowe dam and similar other projects financed by China Exim Bank are counterproductive to China effort to help Africa develops.
- ❖ Evidently, the lack of standards has led China Exim Bank and Chinese Contractors to get involved in this project which is ill-prepared and lack some basic studies.
- ❖ When lending money to African states, China policy- makers must take into account the historical path through which African nation states have come into being.
- ❖ The fragile internal unity of many African states must be sensibly considered and China must ensures that its money will not be used by one community against another given the wide spread tribalism and regionalism in Africa.
- ❖ The above can only be achieved if China subjected the projects under consideration to scrutiny; on political, social, economic and environmental grounds.



- ❖ Unless Chinese policy-makers take the above seriously into account and set minimum acceptable standards for lending money; rather than helping Africa, China investment will continue to trigger social disintegration and fuel internal conflicts.
- ❖ China can either follow the available standards or work out its own standards which will ensure China adherence to international good practices.
- ❖ China must seek ways and means to open channels of communication with African civil society. China should go beyond governmental official channels and create forums and links with Africa civil society.
- ❖ As a pre-requisite, Chinese policy-makers should allow and permit a reasonable platform for Chinese non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups to work with their African counterparts.
- ❖ If China is looking for along term presence in Africa, China needs to reconsider and revise its relations with some abhorrent African governments.

Thank You