

Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars

## ***Lethal Partnership***

**China Investment Destroying African  
Communities: The Case of the Merowe Dam  
Sudan**

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# The Ongoing China Invasion of Africa has Two Main Characteristics:

- 1) Soft Colonization through proxy governments
- 2) Opportunistic



# Soft Colonization

- If former colonisers invaded Africa using their own armies, China adopted a soft approach
- To do this, China forged business partnerships with groups of ruling elites in different countries to plunder Africa natural resources and share the benefits.

# Opportunistic

- Being a heavyweight international player, China carefully chooses its business partners.
- In most cases, the partners are groups of corrupt ruling elites, dictators or human right abusers.
- While China provides international coverage and protection, in exchange, the elites secure unconditional access to their countries' natural resources and share the gains. Sudan government is the best example (i.e., Darfur).

# Destructive Collaboration

- China partnerships, however, go beyond African borders. Some European companies are equally embroiled in this tripartite destructive business.
  - In this case, Alstom of France, Lahmeyer of Germany, ABB, Switzerland provided the necessary technical expertise without which the Chinese companies couldn't carry out their destructive works.

# Destructive Collaboration Continued

- If Chinese Exim bank and the Chinese companies don't respect international guidelines and standards, the European companies know that they are breaking international law, violating international standards and taking part in a forced displacement process.
- Contrary to the ongoing failure, the project could have been a success story had the Chinese and European companies insisted and pressed the dam authority to adopt and follow international standards.

# Destructive Collaboration Continued

- Rather than insisting on the participation of the affected communities, international companies claimed that the affected communities adopted “uncooperative attitudes.”

One important point to note:  
Communities don't oppose the dam project.

Despite acceptance of the affected communities, the Chinese companies (according to the Chinese project manager) hired professional security companies to protect their sites 24 hrs a day!

# Merowe Dam

(locally known as Hamdab)

- The idea of constructing a dam on the River Nile Fourth cataract 350 km downstream from Khartoum has been circulating since 1946, the aim was to control floods.
- After the building of Aswan High dam in 1964 the idea was shelved.
- In 1992, the Sudan Ingaz government hired a Canadian company ( Monennco Agra) to undertake a feasibility study.
- Construction began in 2003

# Merowe Dam: Investors

- China CCMDJV is the main contractor of the dam, contract amount USD 660 million
- Harpin and Jilin got a contract for USD 460 million
- Alstom of France won a contract for power turbines worth USD 300 million
- Lahmeyer International of Germany is the dam consultant with a contract worth more than 19 million Euros.
- ABB Switzerland won a sub-contract for power substations worth USD 60 million.

# The Affected Communities

- According to the dam authority the dam affects three communities:
  - 1) The Hamdab
  - 2) The Amri Group
  - 3) The Manasir Group

A family from Amri welcoming journalists to its new home.



# The Hamdab

- Representing about 8% of the affected people; have been forcibly displaced to a desert area known as Al Multaga.



Sand dunes: Al Multaga Agricultural Project

# The Amri Group

- Representing about 25% of the affected people; half have been displaced to a desert project known as Wadi Al Mugadam; half remain in the original area.



Displaced to the Desert: A Family from the Amri

# The Manasir Group

- The Manasir is the largest affected group representing 67% of the affected communities.
- The group has not been displaced yet, however, the dam authority plans to resettle the group in two desert projects:
  - Al Makabrab near Al Damer ( capital of the Nile State
  - Al Fiddah, in the Nubian desert

# Violations of International Standards

- **Environment:** No independent environmental impact assessment study exists.
- **Society:** The only available study has been carried by the dam consultant Lahmeyer. However, the consultant confessed that ‘ half year before the actual construction of the dam an elaborate resettlement study doesn’t exist’.
  - Experts who visited the resettlement sites determined that the project violates the World Bank guidelines on 63 counts

## Violations of International Standards Continued

- **Health:** A health impact study for the dam identified 20 major negative health impacts.
  - The dam is expected to introduce or exacerbate such serious deadly diseases as malaria, schistosomiasis, river blindness and Rift Valley fever.
  - No precautionary health measures have been adopted

# Violations of International Standards Continued

- The effects of the dam on the downstream population have been ignored.
  - Thousands of small farmers living downstream will face difficulty in irrigating their plots due to lowering of the level of the Nile.
  - Farmers will also be affected by a reduction in annual siltation.

# Human Rights Violations

Since its start the dam project has been marred by gross human rights violations culminating in killing of innocent farmers

# Human Rights Violations Continued

- On Sept. 30th, a group of men, women and children of Korgheli Village demonstrated against around the dam site.
  - 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.

# Human Rights Violations Continued

- On Dec 1, the police again attacked the people of Korgheli village who refused to move and opted to stay in the ruins of their village.
  - The police attacked the villagers to disperse them and eventually closed down the primary school and the health centre to force them to move from their demolished houses.
  - In December 2004 the dam security unit arrested four members of the Manasir Committee.
  - The four were detained for seven month and released without charges in 2005.

# Human Rights Violations Continued

- 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 building and for their own domestic uses.

# Human Rights Violations Continued

- 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 open fire on the people without warning, killing three on the spot and injuring more than forty.

# Human Rights Violations Continued

- In August 2006, the houses and properties of 3000 families in Amri were flooded without warning.
  - The dam authority cordoned the area preventing 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.

# Human Rights Violations Continued

- 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.

# Human Rights Violations Continued

- A year on, no investigations have been carried out into the killings of Amri farmers.
- In 2005, two leading dam and resettlement experts who visited Al Multaga resettlement project reported unprecedented rise in poverty among resettlers .
- Poverty rose from about 10% to more than 60% in two years.
- Many farmers depend on charity handouts as their plots are covered with sand dunes and not available for farming.

# Conclusions

- The experiences of Merowe dam fully expose China's false claims about helping Africans.
- It is evident that China Exim bank doesn't follow environmental guidelines in the projects it finances.
- In pursuance of their own interests and the interests of their partners, Chinese companies proved that their business partnerships are lethal as they bulldozes and displaces poor communities.

# Conclusions

## Continued

- China's investment in Africa triggers and fuels internal conflicts.
- China Exim bank and other European companies must compensate the affected communities of Merowe dam for the suffering, killings and torture they caused to them.
- China needs to thoroughly revise its approach when undertaking projects in Africa. The ongoing approach will no doubt backfire and cause China's reputation a great damage.

# Conclusions

## Continued

- China Exim bank must reconsider its position regarding dialogue with INGOs and the affected communities. Earlier attempts by INGOs and affected communities to engage China Exim in dialogue to improve its environmental standards have failed.
- When undertaking infrastructure projects (dams), China Exim bank must strictly follow the guidelines of the World Commission on Dams (WCD).

# The Sense of Helplessness

