

Press Release
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Death of the Zombie Dam. Again.

Indian Government Halts Construction of Controversial Maheshwar Dam

In what human rights and water activists hope is the final nail in the coffin of the Maheshwar Dam project, located in the Narmada River Valley, the Indian federal government has just ruled that all construction on the dam must cease immediately. The Berkeley-based International Rivers Network (IRN) has worked closely with local community groups that have fought the dam for almost a decade. If built the dam would displace 35,000 people by submerging 61 villages and over 2,000 acres of rich agricultural land.

"This should be the final blow to this controversial project which seems to keep rising from the dead. This Indian government decision should finally kill this Zombie of a dam!" said Ann Kathrin Schneider, policy analyst with the International Rivers Network. "This dam should have been killed off five years ago when we helped scuttle financial support for the dam from the U.S. based Ogden Corporation and two German utilities."

The latest burst of construction activity by the dam builders had only just gotten underway when it was brought to an abrupt end on June 9 by the Indian government. The Ministry of Environment and Forests ruled that dam proponents the S. Kumars Group had failed to provide a comprehensive resettlement plan. Construction had been on hiatus from 2001 to 2006 after U.S. and European financiers backed out in the face of determined local and international opposition to the dam.

Resistance to the Maheshwar dam has always been fierce. Thousands of farmers, laborers and fishers have repeatedly occupied the construction site. Meanwhile, IRN and other human rights groups have successfully persuaded western financial institutions not to lend money to build the dam.

The Maheshwar Dam, upstream of the infamous Sardar Sarovar Dam, is part of the Narmada Valley Development Project that includes 30 big and countless smaller dams. If it were ever completed, benefits from the Maheshwar dam would be limited, and its electricity would be prohibitively expensive. The primary beneficiaries would be the builder, the S. Kumars Group, and financial institutions backing the dam that want interest on their loans.