

WORLD RIVERS

REVIEW

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... and news from India, Latin America, China and more!



Swords to Ploughshares

By Peter Bosshard

The International Development Association (IDA) is the World Bank's fund for the poorest countries. You could be forgiven for thinking that IDA projects primarily aim to reduce poverty, but this is not the case. In the energy sector, IDA favors a business-as-usual approach of large dams and fossil fuel projects. Such projects frequently impact host communities and the environment but don't address the needs of the poor.

International Rivers has launched a campaign to shift international energy finance from the World Bank to the Green Climate Fund, an institution that is better placed to reduce poverty in a climate-friendly way.

The biggest IDA energy project in the past six years was a transmission line that will export electricity to Kenya from the Gibe III Dam and other destructive hydropower projects in Ethiopia. Other large projects included the Kandadji Dam on the Niger River, which will displace 38,000 poor farmers; the costly rehabilitation of the Inga 1 and 2 dams on the Congo River, and a slew of coal, oil and gas projects. About one third of IDA energy lending supported renewable energy technologies, and only a fraction of those benefited the rural communities that are usually bypassed by national electric grids.



Activists called for Power 4 People in front of the World Bank during the Bank's fall meetings in October. Photo: International Rivers

Governments will meet in Moscow on December 16-17 to negotiate their contributions to the 17th replenishment of the IDA fund. One of the official goals of IDA 17 is “inclusive growth,” and the World Bank has committed to “ensuring that the opportunities and benefits of growth are broadly shared throughout the population, including by expanding economic opportunities for the poorest, women and disadvantaged groups.”

The lofty rhetoric masks a sober reality. The Bank has already announced that it plans to fund the Inga 3 Dam on the Congo, the Mphanda Nkuwa Dam on the Zambezi and other mega-dams under IDA 17. These dams will serve cities, mining companies and export markets. Making a mockery of the “inclusive growth” motto, neither Inga

3 nor Mphanda Nkuwa are intended to expand access for poor consumers.

The replenishment of the IDA fund offers an opportunity to use the power of the purse strings, which has often been the language the World Bank understands best. The Power 4 People campaign, which is being coordinated by International Rivers, calls on governments to shift 7% of their contributions – for a total of \$1.6 billion – from IDA to the Green Climate Fund for the support of decentralized renewable energy projects. This amount reflects the portion of IDA lending that the World Bank has spent on destructive energy projects in the past six years.

The Green Climate Fund has been created under the auspices of the UN climate

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World Rivers Review

Volume 28, Number 4
ISSN Number 0890 211

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Commentary

OF HEARTS AND MINDS, THE ARTS AND RIVERS

We who work to protect rivers from destructive enterprises are, fundamentally, agents of change. Those who perpetuate the status quo, in varying degrees all across the world, continue to treat rivers as conduits to receive the discharges of an industrial society, or as energy potential just waiting to be harnessed by dam walls and turbines. The threats are unabating, and so we work to articulate the value of rivers – in all their ecological, economic and cultural terms; to critique the rapacious system that degrades and devalues these lifelines of the Earth, and to proffer alternatives that can meet the needs of humans and other beings without compromising the integrity of our freshwater ecosystems.

We seek to change these patterns and outcomes – to “win the hearts and minds,” as the cliché goes – of those who decide the fate of rivers. We often appeal to the rational mind – producing scientifically validated reports and otherwise “making the case” for a development trajectory that protects and restores ecosystems. And we sometimes appeal to the heart by sharing stories of the people impacted by destructive dam projects, and the courage people display in standing up for their rights. But it is art, in its myriad forms and media, that can often have the greatest catalyzing effect.

In my personal experience, it is the poetic turn of phrase, the rebel-rousing song, a muralists’ vision of an abundant future, or a well-composed photograph that, more than any single news report or research paper, has a greater chance of influencing my thoughts and motivating me to strive as a change agent. Although I’m neither a poet nor a musician nor sculptor, I feel most enlivened when I’m meditatively practicing an “art.” Noodling lyrics in a notebook in a café, keeping beat in a circle of drummers, or fashioning a garden ornament out of left-behind materials awakens even the untalented to the heightened possibilities of what might be. And what is true for an individual, I have discovered, can also be true for an organization.

My greatest lessons on the power of art for environmental outcomes came through my six years of direct involvement with the Wild & Scenic Film Festival, a festival founded “by activists and for activists” and organized by the California-based watershed protection organization, SYRCL (a tricky acronym with a simple and inclusive pronunciation “circle”). With a potential to speak to the mind, heart and body, a great film – including the kinds of innovative documentary formats that fill this festival – can convey information and inspire action like nothing else.

In the years that I headed SYRCL, I met with thousands of film festival-goers, viewed several hundred films, and visited many communities that screened the “Wild & Scenic” film program. Along the way I met with an insurance broker who attend the festival, then quit his job and embarked on a project to build networks of young farmers producing food at a scale that could feed a small village. I met a filmmaker who ditched “Hollywood” and has since produced films that have helped NGOs protect forests and decommission destructive dams. And I’ve met NGO leaders who, after bringing the power of art and film into their “programming,” doubled their membership base and quadrupled their impact. Through these and many other examples I came to understand that art is not just some “side show” to the “real work” of, say, policy advocacy or campaigning against corporations. It is precisely when art becomes integrated into an organization or movement that creativity, fresh strategies and new constituencies are borne. And from that, we’re all stronger, better united and more effective.

In this issue of *World Rivers Review* we take time to reflect on the role of art and artists in shaping and propelling social movements in service of our precious rivers. The Wild & Scenic Film Festival is one example (and if you’re in California in January, or anywhere in the US throughout the year, check it out!), but you’ll read about a number of inspiring artists and creative projects from around the globe that have catalyzed change, and ultimately advanced the case for protecting the rivers of the world.

Jason Rainey



Printed on 55% recycled, 30%
post-consumer recycled waste
paper with vegetable-based inks

MAKING WAVES

In the News

“ The Gibe III Dam will worsen poverty for the most vulnerable. The government already has trouble managing hunger and poverty [among] its citizenry. By taking over land and water resources in the Omo Valley, it is creating a new class of ‘internal refugees’ who will no longer be self-sufficient,” Lori Pottinger from environmental NGO International Rivers told IPS. ”

“Ethiopia’s Indigenous Excluded From Rapid Growth,” IPS, Nov. 11, 2013

“ The Don Sahong Dam will be built on the only channel where fish can migrate year round,” said Ame Trandem, Southeast Asia program director at advocacy group International Rivers. “That’s why it’s so risky to build it here, where there’s a maximum concentration of fish. It’s located on the worst imaginable channel. ”

“New Mekong dam will soon wipe out endangered Irawaddy dolphin, enviros say,” Global Post, November 5, 2013

Vietnam Puts Brake on Dams

The Vietnamese government cancelled plans to build two dams proposed for the Dong Nai River, which jeopardized Cat Tien National Park. The national park received UNESCO recognition as a Biosphere Reserve in 2001 and is one of the largest biosphere reserves in the world.

The World Heritage Committee refused to grant World Heritage Site status to Cat Tien at its annual meeting in June due to threats to its ecological integrity from hydropower development, quarrying and wild animal trading. The park is home to 1,700 species of rare plants and more than 700 animal and bird species.

Vietnam’s Deputy Prime Minister issued the order after receiving information about the dam’s environmental impacts and in response to pressure from local groups, including our partners in the Vietnam Rivers Network.

The decision caps a series of moves by the Vietnamese government to slow the pace of hydropower development in the country. Earlier this year, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung called for a national review of all hydropower projects to increase dam safety. This was prompted by fears that the Song Tranh 2 hydropower complex was not seismically sound. Villagers living near the project have experienced seismic tremors for two years. Another project, the Krei 2 Dam in the country’s Central Highlands, collapsed in June. Investigations revealed that the dam was not constructed in accordance with its approved design.

In May, the Vietnamese government scrapped plans to build 338 hydropower plants because the projects failed to meet environmental standards. According to the Deputy Prime Minister, more than 67 other hydropower projects have been suspended or cancelled since then.

Kate Ross



The Aravalle Dam comes down in Spain. Photo: Rios con Vida

Reviving Rivers in Spain

Hundreds of kilometers of rivers once strangled by dams have been restored in Spain due to the tireless work of groups like Rios con Vida. Spain has 1,300 large dams and around 11,000 small dams. Since 1999, roughly 350 have been demolished to reduce the risk of flooding and to protect salmonid and other critically endangered species. One of the largest dams slated for removal is the 12-meter-high Inturia Dam located in the western Pyrenees mountains.

Changes in water policy during the last 15 years have facilitated, in part, the amazing strides to restore rivers in Spain. In 2000, the European Union approved a water framework directive that demanded the rethinking of how rivers should be managed and utilized. The directive prioritized improving water quality, protecting aquatic ecology and protecting critical habitat. It also called for rivers to be managed on a basinwide level. Further, the EU issued a directive on flooding in 2007 that stipulated that waterways should be managed to reduce the risk of flooding. To meet these more stringent guidelines, more than 7,000 water usage licenses have been canceled in Spain’s North basin and 60 small dams have been removed.

“Little by little, dam removal is being accepted among water officials. Within barely a decade, river advocates have achieved many of their goals in promoting river restoration,” said Pedro Brufao of Rios con Vida.

Recently, the Supreme Court in Spain issued a ruling confirming dam removal rules. Still, Brufao reminds us that “loads of work remains to be done. Scarcely 5% of the country’s rivers are free flowing.”

Susanne Wong

National Green Tribunal of India Halts Construction of Mapithel Dam

By Bharat Lal Seth

On November 12 the National Green Tribunal of India put a temporary stop to construction of the Mapithel Dam being built 40 km from Imphal, the capital of the northeastern state of Manipur. The court ruled that the construction activity on the Thoubal River violated the Forest Act, as project approvals were pending with the Ministry of Environment and Forest. The order gives temporary relief for 804 families in six villages whose homes, farmland and places of worship will be inundated if the dam is commissioned as planned in March 2015.

The dam is intended to generate 7.5 megawatts of hydroelectricity, have an irrigation potential exceeding 30,000 hectares, and supply 10 million gallons of water a day to the residents of Imphal. The affected communities do not wish to stall the project permanently, as it is 90% complete. But under the banner of the Mapithel Dam Affected Villagers Organization (MDAVO), they have protested illegalities and pressed to have social and environmental safeguards adhered to.

From the beginning the villagers have been wary of state government officials reportedly misleading them about the implications of the dam, including saying they would catch fish “as big as thighs” when the project is completed. “Some of the local elders had the wisdom to oppose this project in its early stages, but were roughed up by police commandos,” says Thanmin, secretary of MDAVO. Others, he says, were silenced by job prospects or other financial incentives. Today they are seeking recognition of their dependence on the forest.

The 66-meter-high dam will submerge 1,215 hectares, of which about half is forest. The project received environmental clearance from the ministry in 2005, but the forest clearance is yet to be given. The state government sought the forest clearance only after a case was filed in the National Green Tribunal earlier this year.

The state agencies were given several reminders to stop construction until it received final clearance. Yet construction continues in full swing. “Government of Manipur is forcefully evicting the forest dwellers of Manipur and is preparing to submerge forest land without their consent,” says Jitin Yumnam, a local activist.



This church in Chadong village will be entirely submerged if the dam is commissioned as planned in March 2015.

As of July 2013, the total expenditure incurred on the project is roughly US\$200 million. Approximately 10% of this expenditure has been spent on rehabilitation and resettlement, construction of new roads and other relief assistance. According to court records, 683 out of 804 families have received compensation as of July 2013. The project cannot be commissioned until all families receive the compensation.

The state government has an agreement with the planning commission that the project will be completed by March 2015, and that any cost over the current sanctioned amount will be borne by the state government.

The tribunal has left it to the environment ministry to pass the relevant order, and directed the respondent or state government “not to proceed further in respect of the project” until the next hearing. ●

Power 4 People *from page 1*

change convention. Its mandate is to support developing countries in mitigating and adapting to climate change within a framework of sustainable development. The fund is better placed than the World Bank to reduce energy poverty and mitigate climate change, to turn energy swords into ploughshares. While NGO networks support the creation of the new fund, they still need to ensure that it adopts strict social and environmental safeguard policies for its operations.

“Shifting resources from the World Bank to the Green Climate Fund will send a message that the Bank’s big-is-beautiful philosophy is no longer acceptable,” said Sena Alouka, Executive Director of Jeunes Volontaires pour l’Environnement (Togo). “It will also provide additional funding for projects that reduce energy poverty while protecting the climate and local ecosystems at the same time.” ●

What Can You Do?

International Rivers has launched an online petition, calling on governments to shift their energy funding from IDA to the Green Climate Fund, from a business-as-usual approach to decentralized renewable solutions for the poor. We will continue to put pressure on the World Bank and its member governments through the Power 4 People campaign in 2014. In the meantime, you can sign the online petition at www.internationalrivers.org/campaign-actions.

China's Hydropower Rush Could Devastate Rivers

By Susanne Wong

China's rush to develop its hydropower is already leaving a trail of devastated fisheries and communities in its wake. According to *Renewable Energy Focus*, the country continued its domination of the global hydropower market, installing more than half of new capacity in 2012. China plans to generate 15% of its electricity from renewable energy as part of an effort to reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants. Unlike many other countries, China includes large destructive dams in its renewable energy targets.

Roughly 100 dams are planned or under construction in the Yangtze River basin. Nineteen dams are planned for the Lancang (Upper Mekong), 13 for the Nu and 9 on the Yarlung Tsangpo.

The ecology of the Yangtze River, one of the cradles of Chinese civilization and culture, has been devastated by dam construction and other development projects. WWF China and the Yangtze River Fishery Resources Management Commission under China's Ministry of Agriculture released a report in October that showed a steep decline in fish species on the upper branches of the river. Many important fish species, such as shad, sturgeons and puffer fish, are "on the brink of extinction," according to the report.

Populations of carp species have plummeted two-thirds, from 30 billion to less than 100 million in the past 60 years, reports the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The fisheries office also found that fish species have declined from 143 to 17 in the Jinsha Tributaries.

Weng Lida, director of the Yangtze River Water Resources Protection Bureau, attributed the decline in fish species to the construction of dams, overfishing and pollution. With more dams planned or under construction, the situation is likely to deteriorate.

China's huge hydropower targets, set in 5-year planning documents, are however not being realized as quickly as planned. At least in the Lancang River, little progress has been made. And in the Nu River, dams supposed to be started by 2015 have seen no progress. Some on-the-ground sources suggest that it may be tightening of state lending is holding the dam builders back. Concerns within government may also be the source of delay, with some concerned about whether China's hydropower development plans will be too much for its rivers.

China's environmental NGOs also believe that the government will not push all its rivers over the ecological redline; a number of groups will release a report in December reviewing the devastation of rivers caused by China's rapid economic development in the past 10 years and the short-sighted economic development model that has driven irrational hydropower development.

China's intense pace of dam construction has also left little room for neighboring countries to negotiate on how best to develop shared transboundary rivers. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently expressed concerns about China's plans to dam and divert the Upper Brahmaputra, or Yarlung Tsangpo, with Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang. In an unprecedented move, the prime ministers released a joint statement referring to transboundary rivers as "assets of immense value to the socio-economic development of all riparian countries."

While the statement is a positive step, it is countered by China's plans to build a mammoth 40,000-MW hydropower scheme on the river (a megaproject that some experts say will never be built). China's river lovers and its downstream neighbors will be watching carefully to ensure the rhetoric is not drowned out by poorly planned projects. ●

Indigenous Communities Take Charge with Dam Blockades in Borneo

By Tara Holmes

Anti-dam protests in the Malaysian state of Sarawak in Borneo continue to heat up over the proposed 12 megadams that will devastate the local ecology and destroy indigenous livelihoods. In mid-November, 13 indigenous people from Malaysia's eastern state of Sarawak travelled thousands of kilometers from their home in central Borneo to the capital Kuala Lumpur to protest being thrown off their land for the Murum Dam. The affected communities say they will take the state to court if their demands are not met.

Since September, more than 200 Penan leaders have blockaded the site of the 944MW Murum Dam in a last-ditch effort to get the government and the state owned-power company, Sarawak Energy Berhad, to respect their rights and provide appropriate compensation for the loss of their lands and homes. The Murum dam would flood 245 square kilometers and resettle approximately 1,500 Penan and 80 Kenyah people.

Police recently dismantled the blockade and arrested 10 Penan who were protesting at the dam site. At this writing, 100 communi-



ty members remain at the site and will continue the protest against the dam's construction. Many of the indigenous families forced from their longhouses at Murum have found the replacement housing to be unacceptable, with as many as three families crowding into a single-family sized apartment. The Murum blockade is the

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March 14: A Day for Action for Rivers – and for Creativity

*Every year on March 14 for the past 15 years, people around the world have celebrated the International Day of Action for Rivers and Against Dams with creativity and fortitude. It's a day to celebrate victories, take to the streets, and educate one another about the threats facing our rivers. Our former Day of Action coordinator, **Elizabeth Brink**, shares her memories about the day's more creative moments.*

It takes a certain level of creativity to get out from behind your desk and take any sort of action on March 14. Every year I found myself amazed by the creative energies displayed by our partners and friends that fight for rivers and justice around the world.

Groups in Burma, Thailand and China often get kids involved, painting pictures and writing river poems, which is lovely. Turkish activists once climbed to the top of a mountain and spelled out their message in the snow, to demonstrate the link between mountain headwaters and our rivers and oceans. European activists do great street theatre. Defenders of Patagonia only have to stand next to one of their rivers to create a stunning visual.

My all time favorite creative March 14 event was a poetry slam we held at our California office. A young poet named Abe wrote and performed a series of poems on river themes; I was especially



Day of Action in Tamui Village, Thailand, 2013. These kids are protesting the Ban Kum Dam, proposed for the Mekong River mainstream. The dam is located in Laos, but very close to the Thai border.

moved by his poem dedicated to Juan Pablo Orrego, a Chilean activist and long-time friend of International Rivers.

In 2003, we partnered with Craig Tucker at Friends of the River to host a New Orleans-style jazz funeral for the zombie Auburn Dam. We were celebrating the recent decision to close the diversion tunnel, and finally put the repeatedly proposed project to rest. The event was complete with a coffin-carrying funeral march through the town of Auburn, a performance by the band Mumbo Gumbo, T-shirts, posters and Mardi Gras fish beads for everyone. Our funeral ended on a happy note: the Auburn Dam was never built!

I also love when groups make human chains; these are especially popular in South Asia. For example, there was a 220km human chain to save Bangladesh's Baral River in 2013. They also translated the Day of Action for Rivers logo into Bengali that year. We are always very excited to see the logo in other languages, because that consistency of imagery across events helps to reinforce that we represent a unified movement.

Any action that involves boats is fun; we've seen our share, including actions that included naked Russians, and kayak stars. Any protest that generates a great visual is exciting to me, because people might pay more attention, and learn about the importance of healthy rivers and the threats posed by large dams that communities are actively telling you they do not want. For example, there was a great image of bodies spelling out "Viva Nile" next to the river at Bujagali Falls from a few years back.

Many activists, particularly in the US, tend to rely heavily on facts and intellect to push for change. If we want people outside of our movements to feel differently and behave differently and believe differently, we have to connect with their emotions, and connect with their rivers. Art, photographs, music, dance, poetry



A human river runs through Burdur City in Turkey on March 14, 2013.

Continued opposite

River Stories, Storied Rivers

By Robert Hass

Though the names are still magic – Amazon, Congo, Mississippi, Niger, Platte, Volga, Tiber, Seine, Ganges, Mekong, Rhine, Colorado, Marne, Orinoco, Rio Grande – the rivers themselves have almost disappeared from consciousness in the modern world. Insofar as they exist in our imaginations, that existence is nostalgic. We have turned our memory of the Mississippi into a Mark Twain theme park at Disneyland. Our children don't know where their electricity comes from, they don't know where the water they drink comes from, and in many places on the earth the turgid backwaters of dammed rivers are inflicting on local children an epidemic of the old riverside diseases: dystentary, schistosomiasis, "river blindness." Rivers and the river gods that defined our civilizations have become the sublimated symbols of everything we have done to the planet in the last two hundred years. And the rivers themselves have come to function as trace memories of what we have repressed in the name of our technical mastery. They are the ecological unconscious.

So, of course, they show up in poetry. "I do not know much about gods," T. S. Eliot wrote, who grew up along the Mississippi in St. Louis, "but I think that the river is a strong brown god." "Under various names," wrote Czeslaw Milosz, who grew up in Lithuania along the Neman, "I have praised only you, rivers. You are milk and honey and love and death and dance." I take this to be the first stirrings, even as our civilization did its damming and polluting, of the recognition of what we have lost and need to recover.

When human populations were small enough, the cleansing flow of rivers and their fierce floods could create the illusion that our acts did not have consequences, that they vanished downstream. Now that is no longer true, and we are being compelled to reconsider the work of our hands. And, of course, we are too dependent on our own geographical origins to have lost our connection with them entirely.

It may have been in Roman times that the Danube acquired its common name, since the Romans were great makers of maps, though it had probably been, long before any legions marched

along its banks, a local god in many different cultures, with many different names. I knew of one poem, by the Belgrade poet Vasko Popa, that addresses Father Danube in a sort of Serbian modernist prayer:

*O great Lord Danube
the blood of the white town
Is flowing in your veins
If you love it get up a moment
From your bed of love—
Ride on the largest carp
Pierce the leaden clouds
And come visit your heavenly birthplace
Bring gifts to the white town
The fruits and birds and flowers of paradise
The bell towers will bow down to you
And the streets prostrate themselves
O great Lord Danube*

Rivers, of course, are like stories, and they are like stories that classical strictures on form would approve. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. In between, they flow. Or would flow, if we let them. It's interesting to consider the fact that, in popular culture, in commercial television, what's happened to rivers has happened to stories. A dam is a commercial interruption in a river. A commercial is a dam impeding the flow of a story: it passes the human imagination through the turbine of a sales pitch to generate consumer lust. ●

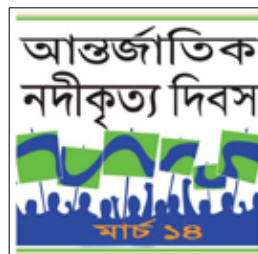
*Robert Hass is an American poet. He served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1995-97. He has been on the International Rivers Board of Directors since 1997. This was excerpted from The Gift of Rivers: True Stories of Life on the Water (Travellers' Tales, 2000).
Read the full essay here: <http://bit.ly/17371qd>*

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and creative action are all effective ways to connect with people emotionally, and remind them why they love rivers.

Last year, we launched the Every River Has A Story, a project that I love. Every river story is a creative masterpiece to me. This year, we will be once again calling upon our partners, allies and friends from around the world to share their River Story. You can send us your story stories@internationalrivers.org or read some of the stories here: <http://bit.ly/myriverstory>.

Exciting events are being planned by groups around the world to mark the International Day of Action for Rivers in March; so far, South Africa, Peru and India, have informed us of their March 14 activities, with more events being planned every day. We hope you'll join in the action with an event celebrating your local river! ●



The Day of Action logo has been translated into numerous languages.

Learn more about the Day of Action for Rivers:
www.internationalrivers.org/node/2065

The Art of Change

By Elizabeth Sabel

At International Rivers, much of our work focuses on in-depth policy and scientific analysis, and advocacy campaigns to stop destructive river projects and press for better options for meeting water and energy needs. We know these efforts play an important role in countering the powerful forces that threaten our rivers. To help create long-term change, the global river protection movement is working to change hearts as well as minds by promoting a vision of water and energy for everyone, and a respect for rivers and the life, livelihoods and traditions tied to them.

We talked to activist-artists using creativity to educate and build community for healthy rivers. In their own words, they talk about the motivation for their projects, lessons learned, and the role art and music have in creating social change.



Mina Girgis, the Nile Project

The Nile Project is a cross-cultural initiative bringing together musicians from the Nile countries to perform along the river and around the world.

The Nile Project inspires, informs, and empowers Nile citizens to work together to foster the sustainability of their ecosystem. We

curate collaborations among Nile musicians to expose audiences to the cultures of their river neighbors. These musical experiences foster cross-cultural empathy and inspire environmental curiosity to shift the Nile from a divisive geo-political argument to a uniting East African conversation.

The most significant innovation of the Nile

Project might be its model: How we are using music to shift paradigms and identities in order to address the challenges at the root of a water-resource conflict. Music is many things: It can serve as a story-telling medium, an outlet of creative expression, or a way to validate our deep cultural connections.

After attending an Ethiopian concert in California, it dawned on me that I would never see Ethiopian music had I been living in Cairo. While Nile citizens could really benefit from this cross-cultural exposure, there is no space for it. The Nile Project is the result of two years of building on this inspiration.

Seeing the way our residencies, workshops, and concerts transform the lives of everyone involved – from our staff to participants, musicians, and audiences – it's clear our music has struck a deep chord. Watching our audiences cry while dancing at our concerts. Hearing them speak of the hope they feel after listening to our musicians. Realizing that our model actually works.

Our biggest challenge has been to hone in on our model, tease out our assumptions, define our impact, and develop our monitoring and evaluation. There are no experts out there who do everything we're doing. It takes a lot of work.



Nile Project musicians make music on the Nile near Aswan. Photo: Nour Mohamed

Nancy Pili, Water Writes

Water Writes is a series of collaborative mural projects in 10 cities around the globe focusing on the relationship between communities and their water sources.

Our creative director, Estria Miyashiro, has been painting his name on walls for over 30 years in the graffiti scene. He was assigned community service after an arrest for graffiti and spent time teaching art to youth. He began to use his artwork to tell the stories affecting the communities he painted in and with. He became aware of the impact that art making has on individuals and the surrounding community.

The process of collectively creating an image and painting it on a wall, with the people whose lives depend on that region's water, is the most inspiring part of this project. The stories of so many of these local heroes are missing from the newspapers and history books. By painting the story in public, with the people involved, we are able to add these perspectives into the collective story. It has been invaluable to meet real-life change makers, not presidents or generals, but everyday people who are standing up to protect

Continued opposite

our life source. Muralism is a way for the people impacted by resource extraction to show what it really looks like to live next to a coal plant or a clear-cut forest. I hope that our art can help raise awareness of water conditions.

The act of painting the story collectively is different from leading an action on the corporation who runs a dam that is destroying the river. But both the action and the collective creation ensure that the story is told from the perspective of the people, not just the corporation.

I feel that large-scale public murals being painted in major cities across the world is a part of the change in priorities going on worldwide. Art is a megaphone to project our side of the story.

We've gotten so many responses about the continued need for art in long-term campaigns. I have been surprised by how much



A Water Writes mural project in Orleans, CA sends the message that dams on the Klamath River should come down. Photo: Nancy Pili

the artists have been impacted by working with the community organizations. Maybe it's that after using your hands to create artwork, pouring the story of a community onto a wall, you are changed by the content of the art, or by the relationships built with the people.

Amy Kober, American Rivers

American Rivers celebrated its 40th anniversary with the help of the Grammy award nominated bluegrass band, the Infamous Stringdusters, touring the great river cities of the US West.

A lot of American Rivers' work is policy and science oriented; it appeals to the intellect. We were trying to reach the heart instead with this project. We all have such deep, strong emotional connections to rivers – we were trying to remind people of that connection. We were also motivated by a desire to reach a younger audience. Art and music are great avenues for storytelling and connecting with people and reaching hearts.

It has been rewarding to partner with local organizations at each tour stop. It helps further the message when working with local partners. Seeing the band's enthusiasm has been great too. They have a genuine desire to help – a desire to share the work of American Rivers with their fans.

It's been very exciting, but our staff is stretched thin – they are undertaking this project on top of other work. My advice to others who want to do something similar is to be careful, look at the bottom line. Try to figure out how to measure raising awareness – What would success look like? Ask yourself this at the beginning.

Anabela Lemos, Justiça Ambiental! (JA!)

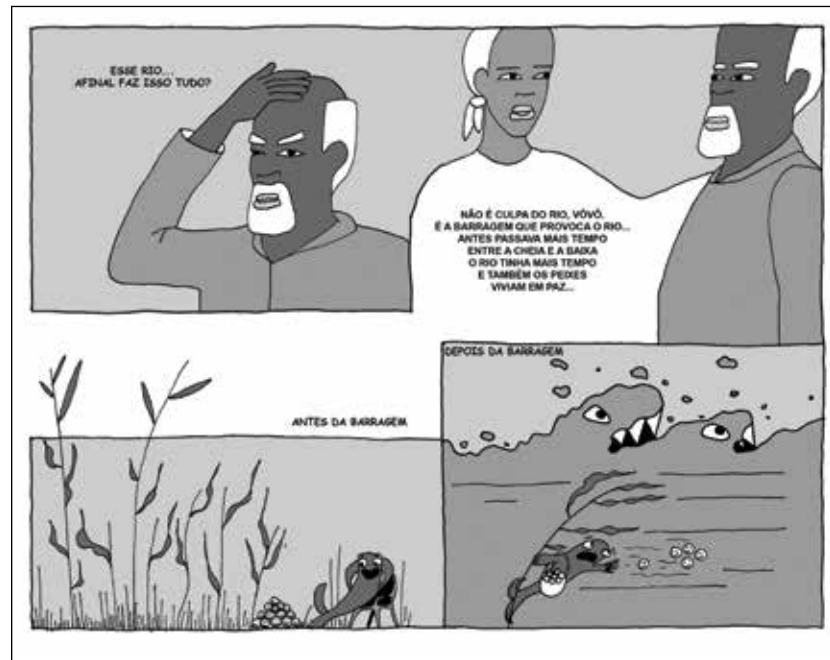
Mozambique-based JA! has created various artistic projects over the years as part of their environmental justice work.

A lot of what we do is try to share information in different ways, to reach people who might otherwise not be interested in the more technical side of the story. Over the years we have transformed scientific information into photographic gallery shows, comic books, and live theatre that will allow everyone to understand, and at the same time have fun learning.

We sometimes use theatre as a way to share information about the issues we work on, and we find that it's a great way to involve affected communities in the findings and improves their understanding of the issues. It's much better than if we just released a study telling them about all the issues they need to know about.

Images sometimes speak louder than words, and can be more effective at reaching more people than just a report. Images and music and other arts can also prompt many questions and open a dialogue. In that way we believe the arts can help us make change.

It is so rewarding to see the reaction of people when they engage with these art projects. It's also great to bring these issues to the national arena in ways that reach people's hearts. For example, we had a major photo exhibition about the Mphanda Nkuwa Dam at Mozambique's National Gallery, which helped give a face to the potential damage this dam would bring. Most people in our capital city have never been near where the dam will be built. When they saw the exhibition many people told us they suddenly realized why we are against the dam, and what will be lost for Mozambique and our people if the dam is built.



A page from a JA! comic book on risks of damming the Zambezi. Artwork by Uno Pereira.

Continued page 15



Colombian Community Paints an Anti-Dam Message

*The Colombian community of La Jagua, now threatened by the El Quimbo Dam, recently painted a series of murals depicting their opposition to the project and their hopes for a better future. We talked to a Colombian member of the group **Entre Aguas**, which helped coordinate the project.*

The mural was an initiative of young people and children from the community of La Jagua, who care about the future of their territory. More than 50 people aged 6-30 years participated in the project. The purpose of the mural was to create a space where young people impacted by construction of El Quimbo could express themselves and paint the future they want

for their country. The site chosen for the mural is a 200-year-old adobe wall, which is part of La Jagua Educational Institute. A local committee repaired and painted the wall in preparation.

Right now, this is a territory without dams. The community's main argument against El Quimbo is the imposition of a megaproject without consultation of impacted communities. This project is destroying the social fabric of communities, regional economies, food sovereignty and the environment.

The Beehive Design Collective, through their Pollination Project, has helped the community of La Jagua since 2008 in their opposition against El Quimbo Hydroelectric Project. The mural was initiated by the Pollination Project, the Jaguos for Territory Collective, and Urban Artist Gouache. ●



Beehive Collective Buzzes with Creative Juices

The Beehive Design Collective specializes in telling complex stories through fantastically creative graphic story telling. The collective, which formed in Maine more than a decade ago, undertakes extensive research to develop artworks about issues such as globalization and environmental injustices. We asked one of the Bees to describe the process.

We see ourselves as word-to-image translators. All of our graphics are collaboratively produced through first-hand research with the impacted communities' stories we are telling, many hours of collective mental mapping-brainstorming-designing, and the illustration and inking that involves multiple drafts that are okayed by the same communities. Once finished, the work of distributing back to the communities who shared their stories as well as other interested people begins. All the work produced by the Beehive is "creative commons" and can be used and reproduced by others for non-profit purposes. Beyond being art, our graphic campaigns are an accessible, multi-lingual/multi-cultural, easily reproduced, dynamic tool for popular education, grassroots communications and community organizing.

The Collective has spent the better part of our 12 years of existence working on our Trilogy of Globalization in the Americas. The first installment tells the story of the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the impacts of neoliberal economic policies. The graphic campaign of Plan Colombia tells the stories of militarization as a smokescreen for resource grabs. The final installment, now in the process of being launched, is Mesoamerica Resiste. We also have the True Cost of Coal, created to tell the history of Appalachia and

the impacts of the coal industry, mountaintop removal and climate change. Our graphic campaigns are accompanied by story telling.

Mesoamerica Resiste – the result of nine years of work – tells the story of the communities most impacted by the policies of Proyecto Mesoamerica (once known as Plan Puebla Panama). We did an initial research tour from Mexico to Panama, listening to the experiences of these communities. We also had conversations with academics, researchers, scientists, solidarity groups, community organizers and others to create this graphic. It tells the stories of a region under the assault of resource extraction, cultural homogenization, violence and displacement, and the responses of community organizing, direct action, struggle, resistance and celebration. These stories are the latest chapter in a process that started with historical European colonization, the coffee and banana industries of multiple centuries, the US-backed military interventions and drug wars.

Our graphic campaigns tell the stories of hundreds of people and communities whose stories of repression and violence are eclipsed by their resilience and perseverance for autonomy, self-determination and liberation. The creation of each graphic campaign is the creation of a new art-organizing tool for the use and support of the communities living the realities depicted in the graphic, as well as a learning tool for people and communities elsewhere who may think their realities are disconnected to the stories in the graphics when in fact they are interconnected and are capable of creating relationships of solidarity. ●

Learn more: <http://beehivecollective.org/en/>



A section of the Mesomerica Resiste graphic by the Beehive Collective.

News Briefs

By Susanne Wong



Removal of Glines Canyon Dam on the Elwha River has resumed after a year's hiatus. Photo: Lower Klallam Tribal Library

Dams removed, salmon return on US rivers

The largest run of Chinook salmon in decades swam up the Elwha River this fall into stretches that were formerly blocked by the Elwha Dam, according to officials with the Olympic National Park.

The Elwha Dam came down in 2012. Removal of a second dam, the 210-foot tall Glines Canyon Dam, resumed last month after a year's delay to solve some technical problems. Removal of the Glines Dam is scheduled to be complete in 2014.

During a one-day survey in September, biologists counted 1,741 adult Chinook and mapped 763 egg nests (called "redds") between the remnants of the Glines Canyon Dam and the river mouth. About 75% of those were spotted upstream of the former Elwha Dam site, park officials said.

Salmon and other fish that mature in the ocean and return to rivers to spawn will once again have access to more than 70 miles of spawning and rearing habitat, much of it within the protected boundaries of Olympic National Park.

Meanwhile, another Pacific Northwest river is also seeing a salmon resurgence. Chinook salmon are spawning in large numbers along stretches of the Rogue River where two dams were removed. Three years after Gold Ray Dam and its antiquated fish ladder came down, state fisheries biologists counted 111 identifiable redds created by spawning chinook – almost three times what was found there three years ago. Upstream of the former site of Savage Rapids Dam, removed in 2009, the count was 186 redds, more than twice the number counted in the same stretch three years ago.

A reporter for the *Mail Tribune* (Oregon) visited undammed sections of the Rogue with fish biologists, and found "big fall chinook salmon spawning in shallow gravel bars that three years ago were covered by 10 feet of water and at least that much sediments captured over 106 years behind what was Gold Ray Dam."

Austria's dam plan draws protest

Community leaders and activists demonstrated in front of Austria's Environment Ministry in September to protest the approval of a dam on one of the country's last free flowing rivers, reported German broadcaster Deutsche Welle.

The Black Sulm River, known for its dark pools of trout-filled water, seemed off limits to hydropower development since it was located in a European Union designated nature protection zone. But in a surprising move, the provincial environmental department downgraded the condition of the river and issued a permit, paving the way for the project to move ahead.

"Why? That's what we ask ourselves. Why this?" said local resident Karl Mathauer. "Normal logic doesn't help in being able to comprehend how a permit was issued."

Protesters have launched a broad campaign to halt the project. They occupied a makeshift campsite along the river for five months. Their protests triggered the Austrian Environment Minister to file a complaint in an appeals court against the Styrian provincial government. Investigations are being conducted at the national and EU levels regarding corruption and rules violations.

The project is part of the Austrian government's initiative to rapidly expand renewable energy production and to become energy self-sufficient by 2050. Austria currently relies of hydropower for 70% of its energy production. According to Deutsche Welle, only four percent of the combined length of Austria's rivers have not been dammed for hydropower or channeled for navigation.

"If we fail to protect this river, it's like a domino thing and all the rest of the intact river

stretches will fall," said Ulrich Eichelmann of the conservation group Riverwatch. Eichelmann says they are committed to stopping the project physically if legal mechanisms fail. "If we don't, then we lose everything."

Harnessing the sun in Cameroon

A growing number of people in Cameroon are turning to solar power to light their homes. Clarkson Agbor, a teacher living in Yaounde, said his family prefers to use solar powered lamps since connections to the heavily hydropower-dependent grid have become unstable and sometimes dangerous.

"My children can now read at night with good light from solar powered lamps that is affordable and safer," Agbor told Reuters. Agbor and his family cannot afford a generator.

Only 40% of homes in Cameroon's urban areas have access to power. In rural areas, where 65% of Cameroonians live, the number drops to 20%.

Those who are connected to the grid suffer frequent outages. When the power is eventually restored, the sudden surges of electricity have caused considerable damage. Numerous businesses and homes have reportedly been destroyed by fires caused by short circuits.

Although the government has not tracked the growth of solar power, the number of registered companies selling and distributing solar panels has increased rapidly.

"We have over 25 registered companies now, up from just seven in 2008. Also, more than 15 NGOs are working with the support of the government to provide solar energy for free in rural communities, where hydroelectricity outreach is largely disfavored," said Moise Anselem

Continued opposite

of the Ministry of Water, Mines and Energy.

NGOs have played a crucial role in expanding electricity access to rural areas. The Society for Initiatives in Rural Development and Environmental Protection launched a program to provide solar power to 20 villages in 2011. They are nearly halfway to their goal.

Fragmented forests trigger extinctions

Scientists at the National University of Singapore have discovered that the pace of species extinction can be remarkably rapid when wilderness is fragmented. Ecologists have long known that the destruction of wildlife habitat threatens the ability of species to survive, but it has been difficult to determine how quickly species become extinct.

When the Thai government built the Chiew Larn Dam in 1987 and flooded the Khlong Saeng valley, it created the conditions for researchers to witness the rate of species extinction.

The reservoir transformed 150 forested hilltops into islands of biodiversity. Researchers then tracked species populations on the islands and compared them with the biodiversity in the forest preserve surrounding the reservoir.

What they found was dramatic. Five years after the dam was built, researchers at the University of California at San Diego found that several species were more rare on the islands than on the mainland.

Dr. Luke Gibson of the National University of Singapore repeated the wildlife surveys in 2012 and found that all seven native species were extinct on most of the islands. On a few islands, some species clung to existence. This suggested

that all of the islands suffered massive extinctions within 20 years, according to *The New York Times*.

In an interesting twist, Malayan rats, which were not previously found on the islands, colonized the islands during the elapsed period. Researchers noted that the rats were not populous in the forest preserve surrounding the reservoir and must have swum to the islands, where they thrived.

The results confirmed similar findings regarding bird extinctions in the Amazon. The findings place new urgency on conserving remaining tropical forests. "Our study shows we may need to do that very quickly," said Dr. Gibson.

Towards a low-carbon South Africa

South Africa's ambitious plans to generate 42% of its electricity from renewables by 2020 is gaining traction, thanks to the nation's minister of energy, Elizabeth Dipuo. Hired to spur private investment in power generation, which was lagging behind the country's economic growth rate, Dipuo recognized that the best opportunities lay in the renewable energy sector, reports *Business Excellence*.

As part of South Africa's Integrated Resource Plan, the nation has launched a series of five bids to encourage private projects that will generate 3,725 MW of renewable energy. The first two rounds drew 47 private operators, which are now working to install renewable energy projects.

Much of the investment is in solar projects in Northern Cape Province. According to a new report by Frost & Sullivan, solar is set to beat out coal as the cheapest form of electricity in South Africa by 2020. The study, financed by the South

Africa Photovoltaic Industry Association, predicts that the price of coal will then be \$0.171 per kWh compared to \$0.075-\$0.127 per kWh for solar. This is a significant development in a country that has traditionally relied on coal for 90% of its electricity needs and is the twelfth largest CO₂ emitting nation in the world.

In addition to championing the installation of renewable energy, Dipuo has encouraged the local production of renewable energy technologies to generate revenues and local jobs. "Energy policy can be a catalyst for job creation: it has the potential to reduce poverty, especially energy poverty," she said.

Ethiopia Nile dam on shaky ground

The design of the foundation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Africa's largest proposed hydropower dam, is flawed, reports *Bloomberg News*. The news agency got the information from an international panel of experts convened by Ethiopia and its neighboring countries to review the project's downstream impacts. The panel's report has not been publicly released.

Egypt and Sudan are concerned about changes to their water supply if the dam is built. Ethiopia – the source of 85% of the Nile's water – is planning a reservoir so large it could hold a year's worth of the Nile's annual flow.

A preliminary hydrological study has estimated that Egypt would suffer a 6% decline in generation from the Aswan Dam if the reservoir were filled during average or high rainfall years. However, the report speculated that the project would "significantly impact water supply to Egypt and cause the loss of power generation at

High Aswan Dam for extended periods" if it were filled during dry years.

The panel urged that further comprehensive studies be conducted. "The analysis presented is very basic, and not yet at a level of detail, sophistication and reliability that would benefit a development of this magnitude, importance and with such regional impact."

Fracking kills fish in Kentucky

Chemicals leaked from fracking operations triggered a sharp rise in the acidity and salinity of Kentucky's Acorn Fork Creek in 2007, according to a recent government investigation. This harmed and killed fish along a two-kilometer stretch of the creek downstream of the operation's wastewater pits.

The study is one of the first to examine the effects of "fracking" chemicals on fish and other aquatic animals.

According to Professor Avner Vengosh of Duke University, waters contaminated by shale gas exploration, "particularly from the Marcellus Shale, are highly saline – about ten times the salinity of seawater – and they contain high levels of toxic metals and naturally occurring radioactivity. The discharge or leaking of such waters would inevitably result in contamination and destruction of the biological system. The capacity of a water system to deal with such contamination would depend on the dilution factor."

The Natural Resources Defense Council released a report in 2012 that found that fracking generates massive amounts of polluted wastewater that threatens the health of drinking water supplies, and that federal and state regulations have not been strengthened to reduce this risk. ●

In Print

Foreclosing the Future: The World Bank and the Politics of Environmental Destruction, by Bruce Rich. Island Press, 2013.

The World Bank – the world’s most powerful development institution – prides itself in undertaking the most complex, difficult initiatives in the developing world. A new book by Bruce Rich, a veteran Bank critic, provides a well-informed and compelling look at why so many of these complex projects fail in basic ways.

Where the state is weak and civil society lacking, a rapid influx of money associated with a World Bank project can easily undermine democracy and the rule of law. Unless governance is strengthened first, aid dollars may not actually lead to social development. Yet the World Bank does not have the patience for slow, messy, participatory processes. Its senior management equates lending volumes with development impact, and the staff is under relentless pressure to move money out the door quickly.

Based on Rich’s three decades of Bank-watching and a treasure trove of internal documents, *Foreclosing the Future* examines the contradictions of the World Bank’s lending culture as manifested in its projects and initiatives. The author describes dams that impoverished local communities and fostered corruption, forestry projects that caused massive deforestation, and coal-fired power plants that bypassed the poor for whose benefit they were supposedly built. He documents repeated promises to learn from past mistakes – and cosmetic reforms that failed to address the Bank’s flawed business model. Rich calls the focus on lending

volume rather than development outcomes the World Bank’s “original sin.”

Rich calls for a reorientation of the World Bank’s priorities to reward the quality of outcomes rather than the quantity of lending. This, he argues, would allow the institution to become a “beacon” of good social and environmental practice, for others to follow. The new book is a welcome reminder as the World Bank enters a new cycle of ignoring the lessons of past mistakes.

Peter Bosshard

Dug Out, Dried Out Or Flooded Out? Hydropower and Mining Threats to the Indigenous Peoples of the Upper Mazaruni District, by Audrey Butt Colson. Survival International, 2013. Free: <http://bit.ly/1ivR3Yt>

Plans to build a massive hydroelectric dam on the land of two indigenous tribes in Guyana would lead to the destruction of a unique people and vast tracts of rainforest, a new report by Survival International reveals.

“Thousands of local people, many indigenous, will be rendered homeless, and there will be a loss of their unrivalled knowledge and use of their ancestral lands as well as the destruction of unique social and cultural systems,” writes anthropologist Dr. Audrey Butt Colson.

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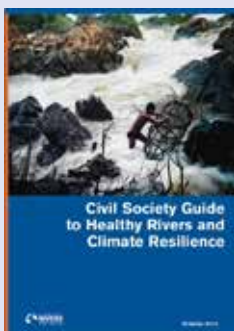
Two New Resources from International Rivers

International Rivers released two new reports in November which are intended to give activists and communities tools to better engage in energy planning debates and planning for climate adaptation.

Civil Society Guide to Healthy Rivers and Climate Resilience describes best practices for adapting to a changing climate when dams threaten rivers and ecosystems they support. The guide explains how rivers strengthen climate resilience, how large dams increase our vulnerability to climate change, and how climate resilience can be integrated into natural resource management and the planning processes for the water and energy sectors.

Developed with the help of a number of partner organizations, the guide includes concrete cases studies and practical guidance for groups working in the water and energy sectors and confronted by dam projects. It lays out ways to help communities facing large dam projects to develop adaptation plans that address the risks that dams bring.

An Introduction to Integrated Resources Planning, by energy planning experts Chris and Chom Greacen, David von Hippel, and David Bill, describes a method for energy planning



that moves “upstream” from individual project plans, giving greater opportunity for planning for energy efficiency early in the process, and creating a more level playing field for analyzing costs and benefits of various options.

Integrated Resources Planning integrates environmental and other external costs, and includes transmission costs before rather than after a new plant has already been approved.

Utilities that rigorously implement IRP consistently find plenty of opportunity for energy efficiency investments, the authors state, resulting in lower energy tariffs and avoided social and environmental impacts of new power plants.

The report describes conventional and IRP power planning, gives a step-by-step plan for an IRP process, and includes “best practice” case studies.

Both reports are available at www.internationalrivers.org

The report describes a project shrouded in secrecy, driven by political maneuvering, and linked to the rapacious Brazilian dam industry. Brazilian construction companies involved in the controversial Belo Monte Dam are likely to bid to build the dam, whose energy will primarily supply mega-mines in Guyana and Brazil.

The government has not obtained the indigenous peoples' free, prior and informed consent, and the tribes have expressed their vocal opposition to the project.

Good Energy, Bad Energy: Transforming our energy system for people and the planet, by Friends of the Earth International, 2013. Free download: www.goodenergybadenergy.org

This lively critique of the modern world's energy system was launched in October as part of the Reclaim Power month of

action. The report details problems with coal, oil, gas, nuclear, industrial agrofuels and biomass, megadams, and waste to energy incineration, and offers a basic outline about how to bring about a cleaner, more just energy system.

"Our vision for a new energy system is guided by the idea of energy sovereignty. This is the right of people to have access to energy, and to choose sustainable energy sources and sustainable consumption patterns that will lead them towards sustainable societies," the authors write.

The report calls for investment in "locally appropriate, climate-safe, affordable and low-impact energy for all"; increased energy efficiency; an end to destructive energy projects, and changes to trade and investment rules that impede the energy transition – "all the while ensuring that the rights of affected communities and workers are respected and that their needs are provided for." ●

second by the Penan people; the first was in September 2012, when a blockade Long Wat village delayed construction of the dam for over a month.

Raymond Abin, of the NGO Save Sarawak's Rivers Network, said: "The authorities just find that this is the only way to deal with the people – refusing to deal with their demands. The easy way is to arrest them in order to intimidate and threaten them."

A coalition of nearly 30 organizations (including International Rivers and the Borneo Project) sent a letter to top authorities in Sarawak and Malaysia warning them of possible human right violations arising from the blockade. Lawyers, human rights groups, medics, media personnel and convoys carrying basic supplies of food and water for distribution all have reported that their access to the site has been blocked.

In addition to the Murum Dam protests, indigenous protestors have successfully halted construction at the site of the 1,200MW Baram Dam, another megadam in Malaysian Borneo. Two road

blockades have been erected to prevent construction: one near Long Lama, on the shores of the Baram River, and a second near the proposed dam site. The dam will flood 400 square kilometers of rainforest (154 square miles) and displace an estimated 20,000 indigenous people.

Sarawak Energy is relocating the Penan to swampy areas that are unable to support their traditional agricultural practices and way of life.

Peter Kallang of SAVE Rivers said: "You cannot say this is a Sarawak problem – this is our national problem. If you look at the impact of a dam on the environment, this is an international problem, because it will drown one of the most biodiverse parts of the world." ●

The author is the communications and outreach manager for The Borneo Project. Learn more: www.borneoproject.org.

Fernando Iglesias Letelier, Festival Rios Libres

The Rios Libres (Free Rivers) is a music festival in Chile that is an outgrowth of a citizen's movement working to confront the threats posed by a hydroelectric project planned for the Maipo River Basin.

The Maipo River Basin is the most important in the region. Since 2007 the North American Company AES Gener has been trying to build the Alto Maipo mega-hydroelectric project. A citizen's movement was created to stop this. As part of this, a group of artists from the valley gathered to create a music festival to educate and generate awareness about threats to Chilean rivers.

Due to the success of the festival, other communities with similar struggles have been asking to collaborate. Now the Free Rivers Festival is not only a strategy to save and defend the Maipo River, but also a strategy to conserve and protect all Chilean rivers.

We live in a country in which mass media is dominated by huge corporations, making it very difficult to engage in honest dialogue, and to transmit our message. This festival allows us to expand our audience.

Supporting conservation through art or music is truly gratifying. The most significant part is discovering that we hold an amazing power, untouchable by the hands of the dominant economic groups. We have a gift that comes from nature, and like the rivers we fight for, we are part of a cycle that transcends what is human towards the universal.

Art has always been an important mechanism for social change. Art can be the voice of the ones who are shut out. The committed artist has the gift to influence people and societies.

The major challenge in this project has been working without money. The value of people whose work has made the festival happen has no price. The biggest lesson that international NGOs have given us is knowing we are not alone in this. When we saw that the companies involved in the destruction of Chilean rivers were the same ones who are taking advantage of natural resources worldwide, we felt that this crusade is a shared one. ●

Latin American River Defenders Gather in Solidarity

By Candy Gonzalez

More than 530 men and women from 14 different countries from Patagonia to Mexico met in October for the 5th Meeting of the “Latin American Network Against Dams and for Rivers, Their Communities and Water” (REDLAR). Dozens of people, part of the Petén Front Against Dams, worked day and night to give us shelter, prepare our meals and guard our proceedings to ensure a peaceful gathering.

We came together near the Usumacinta River in Retalteco, a forest community that is part of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, in northern Petén, Guatemala, to share stories and experiences of struggle and resistance against large dam projects.

We began with representatives of each country describing the threat they are facing. It soon became obvious that we are all facing the same problems – the theft of our natural resources, the privatization of our land and waters, the silencing of protest (too often, violently), and a rise in corruption.

Some of the event’s strongest statements that rang true for all:

- “Dams and extractive activities (mining, oil exploitation, etc.) promise jobs and cheaper energy, but they are false promises.”
- “Rivers are veins the veins of the planet.”
- “They come offering money and development but what we are left with more poverty, more pollution, the loss of land and water.”
- “They claim that dams provide cheaper energy, but they don’t consider the cost to people or to nature. Their energy model is one of exploitation and expropriation.”
- “We were invaded by the cross and the gun; we must remember our indigenous roots to seek a better world for all.”
- “Trans-national corporations use our governments and corrupt our leaders. We cannot wait for someone to lead us but must blaze our own path.”

We discussed the need to protect life and rivers. Dam projects and extractive industries take away our rights – the right to be consulted, the right to have our voices heard. The rights of the people become subservient to that of the trans-nationals.

That is why we must craft a new tomorrow, which involves the people in decision-making and denounces the criminalization of those who bravely defend the rivers and water. We must share our stories and support each other’s struggles.

We must create a movement, with fronts in each of our countries, and involve every sector of our populations. We want energy in service of the people, not the benefit of a few. We realize how important alliances are. We can strengthen and multiply to create unity amongst us to create a more just world. ●