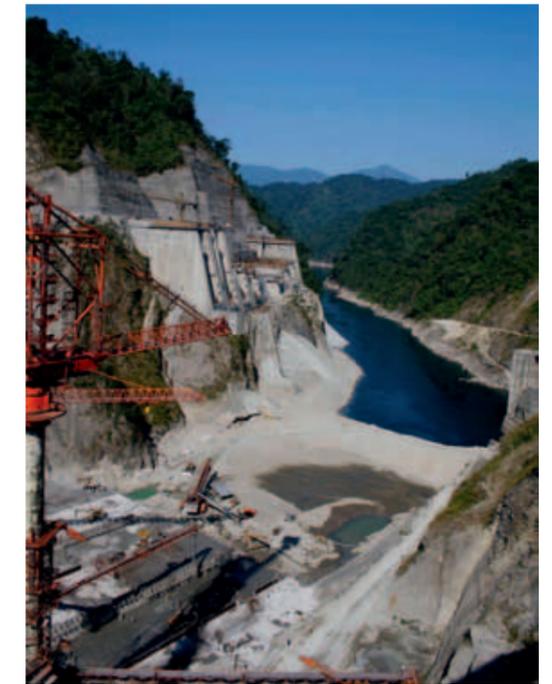


# PROTESTORS, POWER AND MEGA DAMS

Mega dams have caused controversy around the world. The Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric project, being constructed in Arunachal Pradesh, North-east India is no exception. The Subansiri River originates from the snow ranges of Tibet. It flows through Arunachal Pradesh into Assam. The dam, which is in the middle of being constructed, has attracted criticism from various sectors of Indian society, as well as criticism internationally



WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
TANIA GHOSH

### *The capacity of the Hoover dam*

The project is being carried out by a government of India enterprise called the NHPC Limited formerly known as the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation. Construction began in 2005 and is scheduled to finish in 2012. Initially the cost was put at Rs.6285.33 Crores, but local activists say that costs have spiralled to more than RS.10,000 Crores. Once completed it will have almost the same capacity, at 2,000MW, as the Hoover dam, which can produce enough power for 800,000 households.

**Health fears**

A teacher discusses with locals their health concerns about the dam. One such fear was that the dam may spark an increase in malaria in the region which is already plagued with the disease. The report *Health Impacts of Large Dams*, published in the Environmental Impact Assessment Review in 1999, found that mega-dams can have negative effects on human health not only at their reservoir site, but also up and down stream. Increases in vector-borne diseases such as malaria and schistosomiasis have been documented in several large dam projects.

**Displaced by the dam** (top)

A report published by Forced Migration online, *Development Induced Displacement and Resettlement*, finds that adivasis (tribal people) in India account for eight per cent of the total population, but are estimated to make up 40 to 50 per cent of those displaced by development projects. Only 38 families have been directly displaced by the dam and, as such, have been compensated. However, many more people living downstream may be forced from their homes because of the impact on the ecology of the river.

**Breach impact** (above)

A spokesperson for the village outlining the concerns they had regarding the Subansiri dam. He says: 'The 1950s earthquake broke a natural dam in the river and killed thousands of people and livestock downstream, what happens if this mega-dam is breached? A broken bridge has compounded people's fears over the construction quality of the dam especially as the area is prone to earthquakes. The breaching of the mega dam would be a disaster.'

**Failed bridge** (right)

This broken bridge was built by the company in charge of the dam construction. It snapped during a flood in the wet season. Campaigners have been asking whether the NHPC is capable of building a mega dam when it failed to safely construct a small bridge.

**Flood plain** (bottom left)

Cattle graze on the flood plain. People are concerned about the amount of water that will be released during peak times of electricity demand. In the dry season, the level of water flowing through the reservoir will fluctuate dramatically every day from six cubic metres per second of water flow (cumecs) for 20 hours to 2,560 cumecs for around four hours. Cultivation of the flood plain will be impossible during the dry season. Hydroelectric power plants cannot store energy and have to release water when demand requires. This is one of many issues that downstream residents of the Lower Subansiri are concerned about.

**Village people** (bottom right)

This is Tingri village, which will be badly affected once the dam has been constructed. It is home to a Mising Community. The Mising are a Scheduled Tribe, which means that their rights as indigenous people are protected to a degree under the Indian Constitution. The village is typical of Mising communities: houses are on stilts because the area is prone to seasonal flooding.

