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## Indonesia: Mamberamo dam threatens nomadic tribes

Hydroelectric dams have always enormous social and environmental impacts. The construction of these megaprojects is a major cause of forest loss, as well as resulting in widespread human rights violation. As stated in the World Commission on Dams' report, the construction of dams has caused the displacement of 40-80 million people worldwide. More than 40,000 dams have already been built and the Mamberamo dam in West Papua is in the process of becoming one more.

In the 1990s the area of Mamberamo was declared as an industrial and agricultural development area. The energy needed for the envisaged activities was going to be supplied by hydroelectric dams, being one of them the planned dam on the Mamberamo River. If implemented, this project would cost 6 billion dollars and would flood one of the richest biological areas of the world. Not only would this project devastate an incredible environment, but will also impact dramatically on the lives of 35 nomadic tribes who live in the area.

The construction of the dam has already started. In the year 1997 the government officials arrived to a village called Lau --over the river Mamberamo-- and gave a clear message to the local residents: everyone in the village would have to move to the surrounding mountains because their land was going to be flooded by a huge dam. According to an article published in the English newspaper The Guardian, a Lau village chief told the coordinator of the WWF during his visit to the place: "I would rather be shot in the head than be resettled."

The first stage of the "development" plan was completed in 1999 when a South Korean firm, PT Kodeco Mamberamo Plywood, opened a sawmill and established an oil palm plantation. Extensive industrial logging of primary rainforests in the 691,700-hectare concession is already threatening populations of endangered green turtles and birds of paradise. Land that has been cleared by PT Kodeco will serve as a site for a major industrial estate with metal smelting works, sawmills, agribusiness plantations, and petrochemical processing factories -to be powered by the dam.

The plan has prompted a barrage of protests from local inhabitants, particularly through the Greater Mamberamo tribal institution. According to its chief, Wimpie Dilasi, the project, especially the dam, will only create widespread misery.

According to a report in the Indonesian language newspaper, Kompas, West Papua's governor JP Salossa, said that loans from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) would fund the US\$ 6 billion hydro-electric project, whose 3 units would generate 10,000 Megawatts. The organization Down to Earth sent a letter to the World Bank's Environment and Social Development Co-ordinator, Tom Walton, who replied that the Bank "is not funding and has no plans to fund the Mamberamo megaproject." Mr Walton believes that "a correctly-done social, environmental and economic assessment would show it to be a bad idea, no matter what the funding source." However, it is still unknown if the ADB shares the same views and if it will or will not fund the project.

The Indonesian government is clearly ignoring the findings and recommendations produced by the World Commission on Dams, among which the need to gain public acceptance. In this respect, the

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report says: "Acceptance emerges from recognising rights, addressing risks, and safeguarding the entitlements of all groups of affected people, particularly indigenous and tribal peoples, women and other vulnerable groups. Decision making processes and mechanisms are used that enable informed participation by all groups of people, and result in the demonstrable acceptance of key decisions. Where projects affect indigenous and tribal peoples, such processes

are guided by their free, prior and informed consent." None of these recommendations have in this case been met.