
DRC: INGA dams for big business

Along the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo the Inga hydropower scheme has developed a series of hydroelectric dams, two of them already built – Inga I and Inga II- and two more under development – Inga III and Grand Inga (see WRM Bulletin 138, 77).

The Inga III is being developed by the Westcor consortium and would be a tunnel diversion hydropower scheme producing 3,500 MW of electricity with a total cost up to \$8 billion. The Grand Inga Dam includes the related Inga 3. This World Bank US\$80 billion project is the world's largest hydropower scheme and could produce more up to 39,000 MW of electricity, over twice the power generation of Three Gorges Dam in China, and more than a third of the total electricity currently produced in the whole Africa.

Despite such massive energy provision, there is no plan to provide Congolese household with electricity in a country where an estimated 62 million people – 94% of the population – do not have access to electricity and daily power outages plague those few who are connected to the state's dilapidated power grid.

Inga III has been designed to produce electricity for export to industries and urban consumers of South Africa and other neighboring countries, and to attract energy-intensive industries to DRC.

As for Grand Inga, International Rivers Network (IRN) informs that “the mining giant BHP Billiton tried to wrest control over the project by offering the DRC government a sweeter deal. Billiton would use the power from Inga 3 to feed a smelter that will produce 800,000 tons of aluminum per year” and will consume 2,500 MW of electricity, more than DR Congo's entire current power supply.

This confirms concerns that it would be foreign companies which will gain vast economic benefits from the Inga mega-project, and not the vast majority of the Congolese people.

Recently, 14 African and international organizations sent a letter to the chairman of BHP Billiton urging the corporation to impose a moratorium on the project until the Congolese government first fulfills its commitments to bring electricity to its citizens.

(<http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/2010-12-15/ngos-call-moratorium-bhp-billiton%E2%80%99s-congo-smelter>)

Grand Inga and Inga III dams threaten many people who will lose their farmland and their livelihoods in order to build these dams. The Bundi Valley would be flood while paths for transmission lines will imply deforestation of swaths of the second largest rainforest in the world which plays a crucial role in global ecosystem and climate balance. The Congo River, with the second richest diversity of fish on earth, will be affected by damming and turbines that lead to loss of fish populations and destruction of river ecosystems.

As if this were not enough the Grand Inga project is being sold as “clean and environmentally friendly” energy that can offset carbon emissions elsewhere “by harnessing run-of-river

hydroelectricity as opposed to damming up a river". As such it might get a push by the CDM (Clean Development Mechanism)

Indeed, large scale dam projects are not meant for the sake of people's needs and needs to say of environment. They are designed to meet the needs of big business and of big industry that produces in an unsustainable way for unsustainable markets.

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