
[The Bujagali Dam: A useless giant in Uganda](#)

The Ugandan government --backed by the International Finance Corporation, the World Bank, the US agency Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), and a number of European export credit agencies (ECAs)-- is promoting the construction of a huge dam which, if implemented, will destroy the living space of thousands of local dwellers together with the scenic beauty and historical sites at the Bujagali falls region on the Upper Nile River. Responsible for the construction of this US\$ 530 million hydroelectric dam is US-based AES corporation.

The main argument of the promoters of the project is that it will be useful to alleviate poverty and reduce the use of fuelwood and charcoal in a country with one of the lowest per capita income in the world, and where about 95% of the population does not have access to electricity. This argument clearly confuses causes and consequences. As Martin Musumba of "Save Bujagali" Campaign says, "the real issue in Uganda is not electricity but poverty. Currently the majority of Ugandans have no money for electricity, for they are below the poverty line. Production of more electricity will not reduce use of fuelwood and charcoal until deliberate programs are evolved to reduce poverty and the cost of power."

The megaproject would completely alter the landscape, since it would flood the Nile all the way to the base of the Owens Falls Dam. As well as in the case of the Owens Falls Dam, located just 10 miles below the projected site of the Bujagali Dam, no independent environmental impact assessment (EIA) has been performed. According to Dr John Baliwa of the Fisheries Research Programme, the sources of the Nile, an extensive fishery resource with an estimated potential of 10,000 metric tons of fish per year, are menaced by the accumulation of water hyacinth behind the several dams existing in the region. Cumulative impacts including the desiccation of wetlands and the destruction of forests along the river are also feared.

From the socioeconomic point of view, consequences are equally negative. An EIA performed by AES itself considers that the dam would permanently displace 820 people, and affect an additional 6,000 by submerging communal lands and sacred burial sites. Replacement land for those who would lose homes or crops is not planned. In addition, the reservoir is expected to increase serious water-borne diseases like schistosomiasis and malaria, being the latter already the most important cause of death in Uganda. Sustainable tourism activities especially by foreign visitors who like to enjoy rafting in the spectacular series of cascading rapids of the Bujagali Falls will disappear, which will mean a significant decrease in the incomes of local communities. Jobs for local people promised by the company during the works have never turned into reality.

Ugandan and international concerned organizations are putting forward alternatives to this useless giant. They are promoting the use of true renewables like solar and wind, which constitute realistic and viable possibilities in order to stop the pressure on native forests for fuelwood and charcoal. "Future economic prosperity and sustainable water resource management in Uganda will not lie in huge dams. The way forward is the wise use of river-based environmental goods and services; not their extinction through the pursuit of hydropower lunacy," says the Kampala-based National Association of Professional Environmentalists, which carried out a study of the area in February

2000.
