



Big Dams, Big Pipelines, Big Problems: Human Rights and Megaprojects

IHRFG Semi-Annual Meeting, San Francisco, California
Monday, January 25, 2010, 3:30 – 5:00 pm

Facilitator: **Amy Shannon**, Program Officer, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Speakers: **Cesar Gamboa**, President, Rights, Environment and Natural Resources (Peru); **Amalia Souza**, Executive Director, Center for Environmental Support (Brazil); **Christian Poirier**, Brazil Coordinator, Amazon Watch

Sponsor: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation; Grassroots International

Amy Shannon introduced the session by saying that development projects have tangible impacts on peoples' lives that result because specific choices are made about how to engage in development.

Christian Poirier described the probable effects of a proposed hydroelectric dam project in Brazil. Communities will be forced to relocate because of flooding and livelihood opportunities being cut off, as fish that are critical for nutrition will migrate or possibly become extinct. There will be an influx of migrants to other regions, intensifying deforestation. As water dries up, the Brazilian government will need to truck fish and water into the affected communities. This project also has bi-national impact, as parts of Bolivia will also be flooded. There has been no consultation with communities in Bolivia. Tribal leaders are organizing in both countries to protest the lack of consent and consultation and many indigenous groups have declared moving forward with the dam an act of war.

Cesar Gamboa discussed recent oil and mining concessions in Peru. Many of these projects occur on indigenous lands and there is a high level of concern that these lands will be contaminated. Despite that the Peruvian government must comply with ILO Convention 169, ensuring the right of indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making processes that directly affect them, most concessions have occurred without local or national consultations.

Two consequent problems include: (1) Increased risk of disappearance of indigenous cultures and increase of social conflict, (2) Increased contact with indigenous populations resulting in increased illnesses, as these communities are largely isolated and have poor health systems. Numerous protests have occurred in response to extractive projects, prompting repression and brutality from Peruvian police forces.

Amalia Souza is a grantmaker funding these issues. She highlighted that profit is the biggest motivator behind extractive industries and that her organization funds groups so that they have the capacity to negotiate and defend their rights in the face of megaprojects. The Center for Environmental Support makes strategic grants at several levels to maximize impact, as well as helps other foundations make small strategic grants in this field. One example of a grantee is the Instituto Madeira Vivo, which formed to crystallize a movement across Brazil and Bolivia in resistance to the proposed Madeira River dam project.

[Type text]

The Center often funds groups that have never been funded before and finds that their grantees are able to secure additional funding from others after the first grant. Their strategy is to fund small groups all over South America.

Small Group Discussions:

Participants then broke into two groups and discussed the following questions:

- 1) How do we make strategic grants on these issues that impact national policies and capture synergies between protection of the environment and human rights?
- 2) What are the best practices for international grantmakers supporting the protection of indigenous rights in the face of large scale government supported megaprojects?

Participants in one group discussed a number of models used by grantmakers and grassroots groups to address the intersection of environmental protection and human rights. Strategies mentioned included providing long-term financial support, supporting organizations working at a systems level, connecting grassroots organizations to larger social networks and national-level actors, encouraging peer exchange, and providing technical assistance to governments so they do not support detrimental development projects in the first place.

The need for supporting human rights defenders that do resist megaprojects was also discussed, including provision of immediate care and creation of systems within which the threat is eliminated. Corporate social responsibility was mentioned as an allied field and that strategies from this field could also be applicable.

Grantmakers questioned what is the most strategic level at which to intervene, should projects be addressed one by one or at a systemic level? One participant pointed out that it is not always fighting specific development projects, but also building the capacity of civil society organizations over time. The discussion ended acknowledging that sometimes extractive projects seem inevitable and that the best one can do is 'gum up the works', while building capacity of local organizations.

Session wrap-up

The session concluded agreeing that two effective strategies are providing long-term funding and support for capacity building of local organizations. Participants also emphasized the value of exchanging strategies and success stories across regions and connecting people with differing resources and capacities. The group emphasized the need to connect the environmental and human rights movements and to continue funding both movements.