

Environmental Challenges and the Quest for Social Justice in Dam Communities of Nigeria

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Abstract: *While the Nigerian government is focusing its attention on building new dams, the problems and challenges posed by the existing dams to the people and environment across dam communities of Nigeria seem to have been neglected or glossed over. This paper examines the environmental challenges posed by existing dams and how these problems have aggravated grassroots activism and the quest for social justice in dam communities of Nigeria. The paper also examines the institutional arrangement that has been put in place by the government of Nigeria to address these agitations and how effective this might be. On the whole, the paper draws on the concept of community participation to interrogate the socio-cultural and ecologic chasm that certain large dam projects appear to have created between the state and local communities.*

Keywords: environment, environmental degradation, Dams; HYPADDEC; Community participation, Nigeria.

Background

Dams, especially large ones, function to provide water and energy; they are therefore indispensable mechanisms for economic growth. Large dams⁴ are also centres of attraction for travelers and tourists. They provide employment for the unemployed and are rich sources of fresh fishes. Following the importance attached to large dams, reports have shown that between 30% and 40% of irrigated land worldwide depend on dams while 19% of world electricity is generated from them (World Commission on Dams [WCD], 2000). By the end of the 20th century, as many as 45,000 large dams have been built across the world (WCD, 2000) with a staggering \$2 trillion spent on them (International Rivers Network, [IRN], 2003). China, Japan and the United States are some of the leading dam builders in the world while Africa houses the least number of large dams as shown in the report submitted by the World Commission on Dams⁵ in the year 2000 (WCD, 2000) (see table 1 for countries with the biggest dams in the world).

However, as African population continues to grow⁶ and as the new scramble for natural resources in the continent increases, the construction of large scale dams is increasingly becoming necessary due to increase in water and energy needs. Indeed, China has intensified its commitment to assisting Africans in the area of infrastructural development. Thus, the

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⁴ Any dam that is 15m² high or that contains a reservoir volume of more than 3 million cubic metres is defined as large dam (WCD, 2000).

⁵ The World Commission on Dams was inaugurated in 1998 by the World Bank and World Conservation Union (IUCN) to critically review the development effectiveness of large dams and to develop standards, criteria, and guidelines to inform future decision making (Brinkerhoff, 2002). The Commission submitted its report in year 2000 which inadvertently generated mixed-reactions.

⁶ Churchill (1993) has predicted that the period three decades (1990-2020) of explosive growth in energy demand and supply in the developing countries. This, he attributed to the growing population trends in those countries (quoted from Cernea, 1997).

government of China has begun to invest huge resources to building large dams¹ across African shores through her financial institutions and corporations like the China Export-Import Bank and the China Machinery and Equipment Import and Export Company. For example, the China Export-Import Bank promised to support the multi-billion dollars proposed Mphanda Nkuwa Dam on the Zambezi River in Mozambique, in addition to the existing Cahora Bassa and Kariba Dams on the same river (Pottinger, 2006). In 2006, the Nigerian government accepted a US\$2.5 billion loan from the Chinese government, out of which \$1 billion was meant to finance the [Mambilla Hydropower Dam](#) located in Gembu, Taraba State, in the Northern part of Nigeria². Furthermore, the government of Nigeria has proposed additional 234 dams of various sizes and functions to be built by 2015 across rivers and Sub-basins in Nigeria (Shuaib, 2009).

Table1: Countries with the Biggest Dams According to Size and Functional Quality

RANK	COUNTRIES	DAM'S FUNCTIONS			
		Electrical Energy	Water for Drinking	Irrigation	Flood Control
1.	China	China	USA	China	China
2.	USA	USA	United Kingdom	India	USA
3.	India	Canada	Spain	USA	Japan
4.	Spain	Japan	Japan	Korea	Brazil
5.	Japan	Spain	Australia	Spain	Germany
6.	Canada	Italy	Thailand	Turkey	Romania
7.	Korea	France	South Africa	Japan	Mexico
8.	Turkey	Norway	Brazil	Mexico	Korea
9.	Brazil	Brazil	France	South Africa	Canada
10.	France	Swedish	Germany	Albania	Turkey

Adapted from the World Commission on Dams (2000).

While the government of Nigeria is focusing its attention on building new dams and refurbishing the old ones to meet the increased demand for electricity, the problems and challenges posed by the existing large dams to the people and environment across dam communities of Nigeria seem to have been neglected or glossed over. Over the years, dam communities of Nigeria have faced the challenges of displacement caused by floods, destruction of arable lands and degeneration of forests and wildlife resources. Water borne and water washed infections are also common in dam communities of Nigeria due to frequent exposure to flood waters. These incidences are common phenomena across dam communities of Nigeria partly due to the fact that the issue of environmental protection is of less interest whenever it comes to building dams, coupled with the pressure to meet the increasing demand for water and energy as well as alleviation of poverty.

¹ There is a growing concern among civil society and dam-affected peoples' movements around the world that China's own poor record on protecting human rights and the environment may mean double tragedy for African rivers (see <http://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/chinese-dams-in-africa>).

² See also <http://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/chinese-dams-in-africa>

This paper examines the environmental challenges posed by existing dams and how these problems have aggravated grassroots activism and the quest for social justice in dam communities of Nigeria. The paper begins by critically exploring the global debate surrounding the construction and deconstruction of large dams. It provides an overview of environmental challenges in dam communities as a legitimacy for grassroots activism for social justice. The paper also examines the institutional arrangement that have been put in place by the government of Nigeria to address these agitations. It ends on the critical examination of the idea to confront environmental challenges in these areas and how effective this might be.

Dams Development and Environmental Challenges: A Global Perspective

Discourses about the construction of large dams have been polarised into two contending views. First is what can be called the 'developmental discourse'. According to this view, the construction of large scale dams is a demonstration of the supremacy of mankind over the natural environment (Curtin, 2000). From this point of view, sustainable development is linked to large scale centrally controlled schemes like dams (Vyas, 2001). This is because large scale dams are capable of cushioning the effects of natural flooding and meeting the increasing demand for water and energy. In the same vein, large dams have been widely seen as engines of growth and important flood control mechanisms. This line of thought has been epitomised by the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Nehru, who described the Bhakra-Nangal Dam (built on the River Sutluj near Bhakra village in the state of Himachal Pradesh) as "the temples of modern India" (Roy, 1999) symbolising India's "...will to march forward with strength, determination and courage" (McCully, 1996).

While the construction of large scale dams is indeed a prerequisite to economic growth, especially in developing countries where majority of the people have limited access to water and electricity, studies have shown that excessive infrastructural development in water resource management is capable of inducing a significant degradation of downstream ecosystems with a great deal of negative impact on the people (Pearce et al., 2006). The setting up of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) was to examine the developmental dimensions of large dams as well as the reality of their adverse impacts on the people and environment. The WCD became important given the pervasive ecosystem destruction caused by large dams. The destruction has resulted in the loss of vegetation that not only impinges on the ecosystem and biodiversity but also on the livelihoods of people living close to the affected rivers (WCD, 2000). Hence, the second dominant view can be described as the 'adverse impact' discourse. From both the ecological and socio-cultural points of view, this discourse looks at large dams beyond their 'developmental symbolism'. Apart from physical displacement¹ caused by large dams, a more profound ecological impact of dams has been reported. Research findings have shown that more than 60% of the world rivers

¹ The report submitted by the WCD indicates that between 40 to 80 million people have been displaced worldwide to give way to large dams (WCD, 2000).

have been fragmented due to impoundment (WCD 2000). Such impoundment often alters the hydrological components of the rivers; degenerates natural environment; and destroys the habitats and ecological functions of the rivers. McCully (1996) indicated lost of fisheries, lowered water quality and diminished water supply, increased waterborne disease transmission and severe economic shortcomings as some of the consequences of large dam projects. Gup (1994) indicates that the construction of a large dam on a river is a catastrophic event in the life of a riverine ecosystem. Ferradas, (2000) reported that Bayano Dam in Panama had serious ecological and health impacts on the rivers and the people. Schistosomiasis, malaria (Sleigh & Jackson, 1998), hemorrhagic fevers, intestinal parasites and filariasis (including onchocerciasis) (Lerer & Scudder, 1999) have been reported after the completion of dam and irrigation projects.

However, a relatively new wave of academic discourse has emerged as the third dimension in the discourses in the construction of large dams. The discourse is driven mostly by anthropologists and environmental sociologists. The discourse is linked to the 'adverse impact' discourse. This approach examines the socio-cultural and ecological contexts of natural resources often destroyed to build dams. The approach argues that the meaning of water and land upon which dams are built goes beyond what they physically represent in the eyes of the dam builders and the state. In most cases, people are connected to their natural environment (forests, water etc.) socially, economically and spiritually. Beside clean water and energy, natural resources and environments are sources of medicines and healthy diet. Unfortunately, studies have shown that the development of infrastructural facilities like dams often robs indigenous people of their natural and cultural rights over land, rivers and forests which are taken away for the construction of dams. The local people also rarely benefit directly from these dams. Moreover, where villages are submerged, the displaced people are disconnected from their past and ancestors as the graves of their ancestors are washed away. There is also strong evidence to suggest that the relocation arising from the construction of the Mahaweli Hydro and Irrigation Project in Sri Lanka, the Sardar Sarovar Project in India, the Kainji Dam in Nigeria, and many others, did result in massive loss of communal access to land and forest (see Olawepo, 1997; 2010).

Although, resettlement packages - based on economic compensation - have emerged as a means of restitution for projects-caused asset-dispossession (Cernea, 2003), most of these schemes have failed to bring succor to the affected people. Lin (2001) observed that where the so-called 'relocation benefits' or 'compensations' are paid at all, they have failed to reach the targeted populations and marred by corruption allegations and mismanagement which had served to further impoverish the local people affected by dam construction (Fernandes et al., 1989; Scudder, 2003; 2005). The resettled victims of dam projects are therefore worse-off after relocation (Scudder, 2003; 2005). Cernea (2003) summarizes the challenges faced by the displaced people in development projects like dams as landlessness, homelessness, marginalisation, increased morbidity, food insecurity, loss of access to common property, social disarticulation and education loss. Their 'new' relocations are often characterized by uncompleted

and dilapidated structures, bad roads and vulnerable environment. This may have been caused by poor and hasty environmental impact assessment (EIA) and/or non-adherence to the findings and recommendations of EIA. Evidence abounds to suggest that incidence of failed EIA is most rampant in developing countries like Nigeria.

The Nigeria Experience: A Retrospect

Kainji, Jebba and Shiroro dams (built in 1968, 1985 and 1990 respectively) are some of the Nigeria's major dam projects (table 2 shows notable dams in Nigeria). These dams have contributed immensely to socio-economic growth and development of the Nigeria state. For instance, hydropower dams situated in Niger, Kebbi, Kwara, Kebbi and Plateau States generate not less than 50% of electric power consumed in Nigeria (Ugwo, 2002). Beyond this, large dams are developmental spectacles – much like airports, soccer stadia, steel plants and skyscrapers. Beyond the developmental impacts of these dams, they also have negative consequences on the people and their environment, which are often skimmed over at policy levels. Although not much different from the rest of dam communities in around the world, physical displacement, the disintegration of the social fabrics of the communities caused by such displacement, landlessness, impoverishment, denial of communal right to natural resources and so on, are some of the negative consequences of large dams to host communities in Nigeria. For instance, the construction of Kainji Dam in the 1960s displaced more than 50,000 people (IRN, 2003) leading to massive relocation. Five communities were also submerged to erect the Challawa George Dam in Kano State. More than 40 villages were destroyed to construct the Jebba Dam (Kainji Lake Research Institute, 1983).

Furthermore, studies have shown that dam communities of Nigeria have also suffered a great deal of ecological problems and socio-economic losses due to dams built in their areas. For instance, the Kainji, Tiga, Challawa and Shiroro Dams have consistently modified the terrestrial ecosystem and the natural flow of rivers with negative impacts on the quality of water (Commonwealth Education Fund, 2003). Besides, the annual recorded breakdowns of these dams have also subjected local communities to miserable and pathetic conditions. More than ten communities were flooded in October 1998 following defects from the Kainji Dam (Yaqub, 1999). Another flooding occurred in 1999 in these communities

Table 2: Some Notable Dams in Nigeria

S/N	H.A	Dam	Active Capacity (mcm)	Height (m)	Objective	Completed Year
1	1	Zibiya	121	21.5	Irrigation/Water Supply	1990
2	1	Zobe	170	18.9	Irrigation/Water Supply	1983
3	1	Bakolori	403	48.0	Irrigation/Hydro Power	1982
4	1	Goronyo	833	20.0	Irrigation/Water Supply	1984

5	1	Kainji	11,500	65.5	H.P	1968
6	1	Kubli	62	23.0	Irri	1992
7	2	Kontagora	200	32.0	Irri	?
8	2	Asa	344	27.0	W.S	?
9	2	Kagara	39	31.0	W.S	?
10	2	Jebba	1,000	40.0	H.P	1983
11	2	Omi	220	43.0	Irri	?
12	2	Zaria	29.8	15.0	W.S	1974
13	2	Kangimi	59.3	19.2	Irri/W.S	1975
14	2	Shiroro	6,050	105.0	H.P	1989
15	2	Suleja	48.5	27.8	W.S	?
16	2	Usuma	100	45.0	W.S	1984
17	3	Balanga	63	41.0	Irri	1987
18	3	Dandi Kowa	1,770	42.0	Irri/H.P	1988
19	3	Kiri	325	37.0	Irri	1982
20	4	Doma	28.5	15.7	Irri	1982
21	6	Ikere Gorge	565	47.5	Irri/W.S/H.P	?
22	6	Oyan	254	30.4	Irri/W.S/H.P	1983
23	8	Erinle	92.5	27.0	W.S	1989
24	8	Gari	203	22.0	Irri	1980
25	8	Challawa	900	38.0	Irri/W.S	1992
26	8	Watari	92.7	19.8	Irri	1980
27	8	Tiga	1,845	47.2	Irri/W.S	1975
28	8	Kafin Zaki	2,500	40.0	Irri	?
29	8	Tomas	56.6	13.7	Irri	1976
30	8	Jakar	54.4	14.3	Irri.	1976
31	8	Alau	106	9.5	Irri/W.S	1972

Adapted from Okoye and Achakpa (2007)

Note: H.A: Hydrological Area, Irri: irrigation, W.S= Water Supply; H.P= Hydropower; U.C= Under Construction

displacing thousands of people (Okoye & Achakpa, 2007). In August 2001, when Tiga and Challawa Dams (both in Kano State) malfunctioned, more than 20,000 people were displaced; hundreds of hectares of land submerged; and properties worth millions damaged (International Rivers Network [IRN], 2007, Okoye & Achakpa, 2007). In 2003, the breakdown of Shiroro Dam inundated 25 communities displacing more than 14,000 people; livelihoods such as farmlands, cattle and boats were also destroyed (Ujorha, 2004). One of the most recent experiences was the sudden release of water from Bakolori Dam and others that displaced thousands of people in Jigawa, Kebbi and Sokoto States. During this event the Usmanu Danfodio University (UDU) in Sokoto State was cut-off from its immediate environment with other 14 towns and villages relocated in Kebbi State (Nigeria Television Authority, 2010).

Given the foregoing, it is believed that environmental challenges in dam communities are not only deplorable but are specific to people living around such projects. This group of people is therefore vulnerable simply as a consequence of their location and residence. Moreover, because of the scattered nature of settlements around dams, many of these settlements are unable to attract, on their own, development projects like industries that could have replaced the loss they suffer through forceful seizure of their land for dam projects. Therefore, the abandonment that follows is enough to earn dam communities the status of socially deprived communities which must be addressed through a social justice principle.

The Quest for Social Justice in Dam Communities of Nigeria

In Nigeria, new waves of grassroots anti-dam activism have been reported across dam areas in Nigeria (The Sun, 2008). Local communities affected by the activities of dams have formed alliances with academics, researchers and NGOs to demand for social justice as well as economic empowerment for sustainable local development. Such activism has therefore attracted development experts, planners and policy makers. One of the motivations that informed the emergence of such activism is the general belief in dam communities that the water and land on which dams are built are "cultural assets". This is worsened by the age-long neglect, perceived injustice and environmental deprivation that the local people have endured over the years (Akpan, 2005). The past decade has therefore witnessed an unprecedented political movement in the four Northern States of Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara and Niger on the part of the political elites to demand for a better share from the natural resources of their land used by the Federal Government for the generation of hydro-electricity (Ugwu, 2002). However, while it is increasingly clear that the dams cannot be removed from their land the demand for equal distribution of the benefits of the dams is therefore legitimate. Under different political platforms, governments in the four states have demanded that their states be included in the application of the 13% derivation principle under Section 162 Sub Sec. 2 (a) of the 1999 Constitution (Ugwu, 2002). Indeed, the demand for the control of natural assets by these states has again given fresh impetus to the on-going discourses surrounding resource control, revenue allocation as well as the principle of derivation in Nigeria. Therefore, the display of 'loyalty' by the political elites in dam affected states has tactically shifted the debate and demand for social and environmental justice in dam communities to the political domain, thereby given it a new developmental outlook.

A team of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academics (including geographers and environmental sociologists), with support from a number of politicians and policy makers, has, therefore, made a case for the establishment of a body constitutionally mandated to address the lingering socio-economic and environmental crises in dam communities of Nigeria. The body is known as the Hydro Power-producing Areas Development Commission (HYPADEC) modeled after Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The call for the establishment of HYPADEC follows a consensus among the political elites that the levels of poverty and environmental degradation in

dam communities are as a result of dams situated in their areas. Indeed, HYPADDEC, like the NDDC, has been projected and structured to meet the needs and aspirations of the local people in dam affected states; provide social amenities such as health, education, road, water, electricity and river transportation. The end result is to alleviate sufferings of the local people and ecological disasters faced by them (Ugwu, 2002) while simultaneously stimulating local growth and development. After more than five years of deliberations at the Lower and Upper houses of National Assembly, the HYPADDEC bill has been passed into law and assented to by the President of Federal Republic of Nigeria. In his appreciation speech at the floor of the Senate Chamber of the National Assembly, Senator Kuta, a strong member of the team calling for the establishment of the HYPADDEC said:

On behalf of myself, the other Senators from Niger State, the Senators from the other Member-States and the host communities, I wish to show our profound appreciation to Mr. President, Commander-in-Chief ... for signing into law, the Hydro-Electric Power Producing Areas Development Commission Bill. Our appreciation also goes to the leadership of the National Assembly, their Excellencies, the Governors of Member-States and the entire membership of the National Assembly for the overwhelming and wonderful support during the preparation and the passage of this Bill (quoted from the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010, p. 362-363).

The bill as passed proposes that a total of 30% of the revenue generated from the operation of any company involved in hydroelectric dams in any of the member states shall be paid to the Commission (Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission, 2011). The bill further provides that "50% of the money due to member states of the Commission from the Ecological Funds" be credited to the Commission (Community Action for Popular Participation, 2002). Other mandates of the Commission shall include to:

- i) Formulate policies and guidelines for the development of Hydroelectric Power Producing Areas;
- ii) Tackle ecological problems that arise from overloading of dams in the Hydroelectric Power Producing Areas and advise Federal and State governments on the prevention and control of floods and environmental hazards;
- iii) Prepare schemes designed to promote the physical development of the Hydroelectric Power Producing Areas and estimate the cost of implementing such schemes.

Other issues to be handled by the Commission shall include:

- a) Regulate the activities and programme on the two rivers embarked on by Inland Waterways, the River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), state government, industries, private entrepreneurs, communities and local governments.
- b) Protect the rights of riparian communities from either lack of water or untimely and excessive release of water by upstream users.
- c) Monitor the utilization of water by all users especially for irrigation and power generation.
- d) Ensure that all programmes of the various agencies are technically, economically, financially and environmentally acceptable.

- e) Investigate and resolve issues relating to environmental degradation due to flooding and dredging of the river (Sule, 2003).

This appears to be a landmark legislation which is capable of rapidly transforming the development outlook in many dam areas of Nigeria. This is because the mandate of this Commission is likely to guarantee access to deprivable resources like water, electricity and good roads for the people of the dam areas. The implementation must however take adequate cognizance of the possible socio-political and cultural challenges in the path of transformation process.

HYPADDEC: The Road Ahead

It needs to be emphasized that HYPADDEC is a new development project meant to bring succor to the people affected by dams. It is not clear yet if there is a physical structure in place to house the Commission. However, since the pronouncement of the establishment of the HYPADDEC, quite a reasonable number of people have raised important questions, most of which are germane to the successful implementation of the activities of the Commission. In other words, the new plans to solve the social, economic and ecological problems in dam communities of Nigeria have attracted unprecedented attention from within and outside the government. On the one hand are individuals or groups of analysts who see the new plans as major political step capable of ameliorating the problems in dam communities of Nigeria. To this group, the establishment of the HYPADDEC is in line with the recommendations made by the WCD and other organisations which have called for a decentralized ownership of natural resources to addressing problems associated with dams in their respective countries. As a result, HYPADDEC has been designed to address the age-long perceived social injustice in dam areas of Nigeria and simultaneously attend to the lingering socio-economic and environmental challenges in the areas. According to one of the leading political figures that championed the establishment of the HYPADDEC, "the establishment of HYPADDEC will in no small way cushion the effects of the hardship being faced by the inhabitants" and would further make the people of the affected communities and States ... "to feel that they are part and parcel of the projects located in their land" (quoted from Ogbeide, 2011).

However, there are those who are pessimistic about the establishment of the HYPADDEC. To this group of analysts, the stated objectives of the proposed Commission are simply unachievable given the socio-political environment in Nigeria. First of all, the composition and constitution of the whole processes that led to the establishment of the Commission have been challenged. The bill establishing HYPADDEC has failed to make provision for the involvement of the local people directly affected by the activities of the dams in the transformation process. Rather, the Commission is protected against the influence of such people as demonstrated in Clause 5 (3) of the Bill which restated the exclusion of the local people: "the Commission shall not be subject to the control or supervision of any other authority or person in the performance of its function under this Act other than the President" (CAPP, 2002). Thus, there is no provision for the involvement of

the communities in the nomination and appointment of the Board Members of the Commission. Rather, provision is made for the Advisory Committee that consists of the Governors of the affected states, whose overall influence has been preempted by the same Clause 5 (3) of the Act. This deliberate exclusion of the vulnerable population in the development that directly concerns them is an attempt to put in place a continued systematic deprivation of the people; the path they have travelled through, the deprivation in relational issues of inadequate social participation, lack of power and poor impact in the distribution of resources to the communities. Indeed, by the Clause of 5(3) of that Act, the Commission would have failed at conception because the Clause had acted to shield from participation, the same group the Commission was meant to empower.

A legitimate apprehension among analysts and the general public is the endemic corruption and the functioning of the new Commission. Although corruption is a global phenomenon, Nigeria is still rated as the 3rd most corrupt country in the world (Transparency International [TI], 2010). The Nigerian dailies are inundated with cases of corruption in every sector of the Nigerian economy and polity. Compared to South Africa where a former Police Commissioner was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for accepting a bribe of R166,000 (\$20,750.00) to Nigeria where a former Inspector General of Police, an equivalent of the Police Commissioner in South Africa, admitted to have stolen 17 billion Naira (\$113 million) and was released barely few weeks into his jail term after entering into a ridiculous plea bargaining. The N10 billion (\$66 million) corruption allegations against key former leaders of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly is another good example of a country where corruption is deeply entrenched (www.punchng.com). In *Corruption and Environmental Degradation in Nigeria and its Niger Delta*, Ehwarieme and Cocodia (2011) noted that corruption levels have continued to fuel the ecological disasters in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Enweremadu (2008) sees corruption as the major stumbling block to socio-economic development in the Niger Delta rather than inadequacies of the revenue sharing formula and limited economic opportunities. They argue that the increasing frequency and the intensification of corrupt acts among political actors, community leaders and private oil companies operating in the Niger Delta have been the hallmark of politics in the region. They mentioned that of the four past governors of the major oil producing states (Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers) three have either been accused or convicted for large scale corruption. Indeed, it is in the news that one of these governors is serving a jail term in the United Kingdom for money laundering. Thus, given the widespread corruption in Nigeria, there is a growing paranoia among the public that commissions are established to pave way for corrupt political elites to embezzle public funds. This cannot also be disconnected from the fact that Nigerians have witnessed the establishment of countless number of development commissions, many of which are riddled with all kinds of corrupt allegations.

Finally, the current definition of dam affected areas remains vague. Initially and at the moment, HYPADDEC member states are defined as Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Niger and Plateau on the basis of hydropower dams in their respective states. The mandate of the Commission excludes States

where dams are built to supply only water for domestic and national consumption. These communities have also suffered environmental injustice as a consequence of the dams built on their land and water. The biggest challenge therefore is how the government intends to tackle the socio-political and cultural challenges that may hinder the effective operation and implementation of the mandates of the HYPADDEC.

Conclusions

The Nigerian population is growing rapidly. It remains one of the fastest growing populations in the world. The Nigerian State is therefore faced with the challenges of meeting increasing demand for water and electricity for economic growth and development. In this light, the construction of large scale dams might still remain a plausible option. Besides, evidence available among the political class suggests that large scale dams are still considered as indispensable mechanisms for growth and economic development. Many still perceive large dams as embodiment of an impressive achievement and one of the most visible manifestations of civil engineering in order to meet the water and energy crises in Nigeria. In view of this, the campaign for the stoppage of large scale dams, as seen in some parts of the world, is not only difficult in Nigeria, it is unrealistic. The major challenge, however, is how to build and construct dams in such a way that are less threatening to the people and environment. Thus, as more dams are being proposed, there is the need for dam builders and the state to try to minimize the negative impact of these dams through better environmental impact assessment (EIA) and execution and address the problems with existing dams that are responsible for the emerging grassroots activism and the quest for social justice in dam communities of Nigeria.

After many years of political neglect and abandonment, it seems that the Nigerian government has resolved to tackle development challenges in the affected dam communities through the establishment of HYPADDEC modeled after the NDDC in the Niger Delta region. The establishment of this Commission has become important against the backdrop of looming youth violence in most dam communities of Nigeria and age-long neglect and degradation. However, there are concerns in some quarters that a number of developmental salient challenges and issues need to be resolved in order for the Commission to have a smooth take-off as well as safe-landing. The seemingly paranoia as expressed in some quarters is informed by the fact that many previous commissions have misplaced their mandates and priorities. Some of the salient issues raised bother on how the newly established commission be devoid of the corruption challenges facing the Nigerian society as a whole. Others include how the commission can be structured to ensure equitable distribution of resources in dam communities and how the so-called benefits meet the affected or targeted populations. There is therefore the need for development planners to begin to look into the contradictions embedded in the law establishing HYPADDEC and see how local people can be actively involved in the planning and execution of the project designed to cater for their needs.

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