Development Aid and Civil Society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo:

A Study of the Inga Hydropower Project as a Poverty Reduction Strategy

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the roles of development assistance and civil society organisations in sustainable peace building, poverty alleviation, reconstruction, and development of the war torn Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This research contends that mega projects, including the Inga Hydropower Project (IHP), often produce adverse effects on the poor and village dwellers that need development the most. In fact, development projects dispossess the poor of their most valuable assets (land, water, and the rights to use forest products). Many mega development projects remain therefore breeding grounds for structural exclusion and struggles for inclusion and nonrevolutionary revolutions, aborted revolutions\(^1\), and socio-political instability for both the poor and the rich.

This paper used the concepts of *poverty production*\(^3\), good governance, public accountability, and Foreign Direct Investment in the first two phases of the IHP, namely Inga 1 and Inga 2, to interrogate the findings of M. Ugur Karakaplan, Bilin Neyapti and Selin Sayek which support the following hypotheses: (1) that countries that receive aid also become more likely to receive FDI, and (2) this happens especially in cases of good governance and financial market development, and not necessarily otherwise\(^4\). The paper also explored the civil society-donor funding relations, civil society theory\(^5\) with the aim of unpacking the meaning and the role of civil society organisations in the context of the DRC.

This is a qualitative research. I used purposive sampling to select individuals that met specific criteria for inclusion - e.g. being a dam-affected person, key civil society official or government official... - and snowball technique to locate other participants from the first that I met and who accepted to participate in this research. The study used in-depth interviews with 16 key officials from the civil society sector, key government officials, and the dam-affected communities. Secondary data includes civil society organizations’ press releases, memorandums, the 2006 DRC Constitution, environmental laws, international treaties and conventions, and the recommendations of the World Commission of Dams, newspaper articles and diverse publications.

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Ankara: Bilkent University.

There are four key findings from this research. First, civil society organizations have made some progress in peace building which led to the democratic elections. However, civil society organizations as a means of interrogating power has still several challenges which require a radical change in aid policy intervention; an active, visionary, and competent leadership rather than the opportunistic individuals who use these institutions as a stepping stone to political positions in the government. Second, the IHP had permanently displaced thousands of local people without consultation or compensation. As a result of this forced displacement, dispossession of land and water without compensation - although development aid is useful in building the infrastructures such as schools, hospital, and road and it has contributed to development of several countries - the dam-affected communities are poorer now than they were before the IHP. Third, the conditionality of debt and repayment thereof worsen the vulnerability of poor households in the cities and rural area, and compete with social projects such as building schools even if the project outputs do not seem to fairly benefit all citizens. Four, the trickle-down effects of the mega projects, the IHP included, remain questionable to ordinary citizens who powerlessly observe their standard of living deteriorating, leading a situation where the poor becomes poorer; and the rich getting richer.

References


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