

Gilgel Gibe III: Dam-Induced Displacement in Ethiopia and Kenya

Authors : Jonny Beirne

Abstract : Hydropower developments have come to assume an important role within the Ethiopian government's overall development strategy for the country during the last ten years. The Gilgel Gibe III on the Omo river, due to become operational in September 2014, represents the most ambitious, and controversial, of these projects to date. Further aspects of the government's national development strategy include leasing vast areas of designated 'unused' land for large-scale commercial agricultural projects and 'voluntarily' villagizing scattered, semi-nomadic agro-pastoralist groups to centralized settlements so as to use land and water more efficiently and to better provide essential social services such as education and healthcare. The Lower Omo valley, along the Omo River, is one of the sites of this villagization programme as well as of these large-scale commercial agricultural projects which are made possible owing to the regulation of the river's flow by Gibe III. Though the Ethiopian government cite many positive aspects of these agricultural and hydropower developments there are still expected to be serious regional and transnational effects, including on migration flows, in an area already characterized by increasing climatic vulnerability with attendant population movements and conflicts over scarce resources. The following paper is an attempt to track actual and anticipated migration flows resulting from the construction of Gibe III in the immediate vicinity of the dam, downstream in the Lower Omo Valley and across the border in Kenya around Lake Turkana. In the case of those displaced in the Lower Omo Valley, this will be considered in view of the distinction between voluntary villagization and forced resettlement. The research presented is not primary-source material. Instead, it is drawn from the reports and assessments of the Ethiopian government, rights-based groups, and academic researchers as well as media articles. It is hoped that this will serve to draw greater attention to the issue and encourage further methodological research on the dynamics of dam constructions (and associated large-scale irrigation schemes) on migration flows and on the ultimate experience of displacement and resettlement for environmental migrants in the region.

Keywords : forced displacement, voluntary resettlement, migration, human rights, human security, land grabs, dams, commercial agriculture, pastoralism, ecosystem modification, natural resource conflict, livelihoods, development

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