

Haileybury MUN

Research report



Environmental commission: committee 2

The question of minimising the environmental impact of dams

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Introduction/background information:

A dam is a barrier constructed for the purpose of holding back water forcing a rise in the water level, this forms a reservoir used as either a water source or to generate electricity. The increasing demand of renewable electricity is causing major dam production to increase, in 2014 more than 3,700 hydropower projects were planned or under construction, when finished experts believe this could block free flowing rivers by more than 20%. The opposition to large dams primarily stems from multiple environmental, economic, social and safety concerns. Between 40 and 80 million people have been displaced, mostly from India and China. Unfortunately, evictions are not the only effects faced from large dams, downstream there are often lost fisheries, contaminated water, soil erosion (natural fertilizers washed away) and even decreased amounts of water. It is estimated that over 400,000 square kilometres (0.3% of the worlds landmass) have been flooded by reservoirs worldwide. While dams can often stop regular annual floods, they usually fail to hold back unexpectedly large floods.

UN Action:

In 2017 the UN called for international action on mine tailings dams safety and environment concerns. The main concerns were over the number of serious failures of dams, as in 2015 millions of tonnes of toxic sludge and mud killed 19 people.

Relevant resolutions:

Dams and Development Project (DDP) – 2002

Recent examples of Dams:

Patel dam – Kenya: Located 120 miles from the capital, Nairobi the dam was illegally built and burst in 2018 killing 40 people.

Bakun Dam – Malaysia: Produces 2,400 MW, caused the flooding of over 700 Km of the Malaysian rainforest. The upstream palm oil plantations had chemical runoff which made the water very acidic and eroding the turbines.

Possible Solutions:

1. Are there any other ways of obtaining renewable electricity that could be promoted?
2. Are there any ways that member states' governments can regulate dam construction?
3. Think of 'carrot and stick' to limit building of dams that could cause harm to the government.