

# Pitfalls of Hydropower Project to meet Climate and Sustainability Objectives

*8th December 2014 - COP20 Mountains and Water Pavilion*

## Report Summary

The event “Pitfalls Of Hydropower Project To Meet Climate And Sustainability Objectives”, held at the COP20 Mountains and Water Pavilion, gave participants the opportunity to listen to first hand experiences of affected communities in Guatemala, Panama and Colombia. The panel included local community representatives, civil society and experts on international environmental law and climate finance who raised concerns on how indigenous populations often face challenges to defend their rights in relation to the construction of large hydropower dams. CDM hydroelectric projects in Guatemala, Panama and Colombia show that local communities often face challenges to defend their rights in relation to the construction, which gave the event important significance.

Monti Aguirre opened the debate by pointing out violations of communities’ rights to the lands, territories and resources that they have traditionally lived on, as well as stressing the dramatic consequences occurring when stakeholder consultations are not conducted. Maximo Ba Tiul, Q’eqchies community representative from the Peoples' Council of Tezulutlan in Coban, Alto Verapez, Guatemala shared the experience of the Santa Rita hydroelectric dam in Guatemala. Similarly Consuelo Acevedo, activist of El Movimiento Social por la Defensa del Río Sogamoso, presented the Sogamoso hydroelectric dam in Columbia. Adelaida Miranda, (also called Weni Bagame) member of the Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous community in Panama, representative of El Movimiento 10 de Abril, introduced the Barro Blanco hydroelectric dam in Panama. Andrea Rodriguez from AIDA raised concerns about hydropower dams as solutions for climate change. Finally, Eva Filzmoser, director of Carbon Market Watch, underlined the problems faced by local stakeholder consultation and the need for grievance mechanisms.

*Below is a more detailed summary of the presentations:*

**Maximo Ba Tiul**, Q’eqchies representative of Peoples' Council of Tezulutlán talked about the CDM hydroelectric dam project Santa Rita and explained that more than 20 communities have been affected by the project. Despite an improper local stakeholder’s consultation, the government gave the green light to build the project – and even before that the environmental impact study of the hydroelectric plant was approved. In 2013, the CPT requested the Executive Board of the CDM not to register the Hydroelectric Project Santa Rita due to failures in compliance with the rules of the mechanism itself, human rights violations in the surrounding communities and non-compliance with national legislation. Nevertheless, the plant was registered in June 2014 by the CDM Board. On the 14th of August 2014, in response to the communities peacefully protested against this decision, local communities were confronted with more than 1600 police officers sent to evict them from their homes on the mountains. Maximo ended his presentation urging policy makers in the UNFCCC process to show respect to the Right to Life, Right to Private Land Ownership, the Right to Non-Discrimination and the Right to Development. In this sad story, seven indigenous persons already died, including two children.

See presentation [here](#)

**Consuelo Acevedo**, from El Movimiento Social por la Defensa del Río Sogamoso, started her presentation about the Sogamoso hydroelectric dam in Columbia by reminding participants of the

disappearance of the leader of the activist group. She raised the question that while the project didn't take into consideration the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams, was imposed without any participation of the local communities in the decision making, disregarded the sensitive impact on the ecosystem protected by the Ramsar convention and has been producing negative socio-economic impacts, how this dam was registered under the CDM, can really be labelled as 'clean development'.

See presentation [here](#)

**Weni Bagame**, member of the Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous community in Panama, representative of El Movimiento 10 de Abril, presented the Barro Blanco hydroelectric dam in Panama. The project was registered under the CDM in June 2011. She stressed that the water reservoir of the dam is expected to flood land belonging to the Comarca of the Ngöbe-Buglé and will affect more than 5000 farmers. Voices of the communities about the implementation of the dam have been totally ignored, human rights violated and three indigenous people have lost their lives in this struggle. She concluded, that support from the Panamanian State in this process has been absent, the project has not fulfilled its national and international obligations with respect to the rights of public participation in projects decision-making; the CDM stakeholder consultation requirements; and protection from state-sponsored violence.

See presentation [here](#)

**Andrea Rodriguez** from AIDA approached the downsides of hydropower dams as solutions for climate change. These dams are labelled under the Clean Development Mechanism as "clean energy" while in reality they are neither clean or endorse sustainable energy. For many reasons, hydropower dams are damaging for the climate; they contribute to climate change with methane emissions, they make adaptation more difficult because they threaten entire hydrologic systems and destroy key ecosystems and fisheries, they entail cost overruns, delays and economic damages, it takes a long time before becoming operational which makes them an inferior solution to the urgent energy crisis that they are intended to tackle, they cause great and irreparable environmental damage to rivers, and their inadequate implementation generates human rights violations and impoverishment of local communities. Therefore she encouraged to reject these mega projects in the future and asked world leaders at the UN Climate Summit in Lima to halt financial incentives and stop promoting the construction of large dams.

See presentation [here](#)

**Eva Filzmoser**, director of Carbon Market Watch, underlined the challenges of indigenous communities struggling against hydropower dams. The three case studies in Panama, Guatemala and Panama show that the current rules for stakeholder involvement need to be strengthened and clarified to ensure that people affected by the project are being consulted. She underlined the need for a robust public participation process including opportunities to provide comments about CDM projects at any stage during the project cycle, international safeguards to be applied to all registered CDM projects, a grievance mechanism for affected stakeholders in case of negative impacts. These examples demonstrate the sad reality of CDM hydropower dams leading to violations of human rights. She called the CDM Board to take responsibility and action, by reviewing their rules and procedures to ensure that people affected by the project are being consulted.