

TCD Field Research Grant Report

Exploring Forced Displacement and Sustainable Development in the Wake of Large Clean Development Mechanism.

Large dams for hydropower currently play an integral role in climate change mitigation strategies and are proliferating in tropical regions, including the Amazon. The local implications of large dams can be overshadowed by the global, national, and regional benefits promised. My research aims to address the disconnect between the stated Clean Development Mechanism sustainable development goals and on the ground outcomes through assessing impacted rural communities. A comparative study of communities forcibly displaced by the Santo Antonio and Jirau dams would provide for a useful analysis of two separate CDM projects and their resettlement policies in the same region, advance an understanding of how these different policies impact land use decisions in impacted communities, and would facilitate a better understanding of how large CDM projects play out at a local scale, specifically in regards to promoting sustainable development. Understanding how CDM dam projects play out at a local scale, impact rural communities, and contribute to sustainable development can offer insight for the hundreds of dams that are in the planning and construction stages in the Amazon region as a whole.

I applied for the TCD Field Research Grant in order to do exploratory dissertation field research in Porto Velho, Brazil to further this research idea, and the time I spent there, from June 20 to July 27, 2016 proved very fruitful. My goals for this time included understanding the local social impacts of the Santo Antonio and Jirau dams, understanding how possible a comparative assessment would be (both logistically and in terms of usefulness), to meet with researchers from the local university, to speak with impacted communities and social movements, and to improve my Portuguese for when the time comes to do field work. I spent much of my time meeting with impacted community members, NGO staff, lawyers, social movement leaders, community organizers, and attending community meetings. I also spent time at the Federal University of Rondonia with students and faculty learning about their work.

In the midst of the political situation in Brazil, this was perhaps not the easiest time to do this research, however, I had many wonderful meetings and gained an immense amount of knowledge about what is happening around the city of Porto Velho in the wake of the completion of the two dams. Meetings with the Movement of Dam Affected People (MAB) of Rondonia were especially helpful in understanding what is happening in impacted communities, where gains have been made, where people are still fighting, and where new issues are cropping up. For example, there are a lot of issues regarding the Santo Antonio dam's proposal to raise the reservoir level, potentially impacting hundreds more families. Roads along the river bank have collapsed, isolating portions of the city, and remained so for months.



A second issue that came up in almost every conversation with NGOs, activist groups, and community members that I had was the increase in violence and threats against women activists in the area that were fighting for compensation. I had the opportunity to meet with a family that had to flee the city because of threats. These conversations gave me a new perspective on the social climate in Porto Velho and the issues facing communities who are (and have been for many years now) organizing to protect their livelihoods.

I was also able to attend meetings in a community that is working with the project developers on community projects, such as building a space for women entrepreneurs, and observe the



Community meeting at Nova Mutum Parana with the project developer of the Jirau Dam, Energia Sustentável do Brasil regarding community projects.

interplay between the relocated community members and the project developer. All of these experiences allowed me to assess important issues regarding the social impacts of the dams.

In terms of meeting the second goal, I learned a lot about the difficulties of doing research in this region. Firstly, I learned that I will need time to complete any study, comparative or not, because it is logistically difficult to reach rural communities. With enough time, it will certainly be possible. Additionally, I proposed my idea of a comparative study of two or three specific impacted communities to many of the folks that I met with and it was met with an overwhelmingly positive response. I made many contacts that are willing to help me reach the communities when I return to do dissertation research. I was able to narrow down possible study sites to three communities that were each impacted differently.

I think that the most important outcome of this preliminary research for me was the impact that it had on my study idea and research questions. I had been thinking about doing a gendered analysis and this trip allowed me to meet with professor Maria das Graças, a feminist geographer at the Federal University of Rondonia. I was able to not only discuss these ideas with her, but also to meet her students, learn what they are doing, and participate in the research group on gender, GEPGENERO which helped me to expand my understanding of what it is like to do research on the ground and to have a better feel for what work has been done and what work is currently being done. These particular conversations and theoretical discussions helped me to move forward my thinking and ideas regarding including gender in my study, to understand the importance of a gendered analysis in this region, and to make contacts with people in the area who work in the same or nearby communities. We had field visits planned but do to some logistical issues (car trouble) we did not make it. This, however, was another learning experience. In rural communities that are not accessible by paved roads, it is important to secure reliable transportation for research purposes and carpooling is an excellent resource. I also gained access to a new world of literature in Portuguese that will be very important in crafting my research questions and in designing my research methods.

I would like to thank TCD for this opportunity but I also greatly appreciate the time and energy of the Movement of Dam Affected People in Rondonia, the GEPGEPERS research group, Professor Maria das Graças, the communities of Nova Mutum, Santa Rita, and Novo Teotonio, and the many individuals who were so welcoming, knowledgeable, and willing to open their homes and share their experiences with me.