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Medha Bisht

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What is This?
Conceptualising Movements against Large Dams: Case Study Analysis of NBA Strategies, Linkages and State Response

Medha Bisht
Associate Fellow, South Asia Cluster, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA)
medha.bisht@gmail.com

Abstract
The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is a protracted struggle of more than three decades against large dams. While the movement has been a witness to various highs and lows, some key lessons nevertheless can be deducted by analysing its overall successes and failures. Arguments presented in this article are based on the assumption that ‘domestic mobilisation is one of the main strategies in shaping political will amongst state actors’. It argues that while transnational advocacy can help build consensus or appreciation towards critical developmental issues at the international level, domestic mobilisation or consensus amongst key stakeholders is perhaps the pre-requisite for influencing state response.

The article is divided into three broad sections. The first section focuses on the history of the NBA. The genesis, nature and the role played by the movement in broadening the debate on dams with respect to development is studied. The second section deals with the internationalisation of the issue of large dams, when the NBA came to be known as a strong opponent of large dams. Based on the insights of the struggle in the third section some pointers are offered for social movements towards effectively shaping state behaviour on social and development issues.

Keywords
Narmada Bachao Andolan, trans-national advocacy, domestic mobilisation, World Commission on Dams, International Rivers Network, Berne Declaration, negotiations, non-governmental organisations, strategy, political will
Narmada Bachao Andolan: Revisiting History

The roots of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) can be traced to the Narmada Bachao Samitis (NBS), a collective of organisations, formed in mid-1970s in response to the verdict of the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal (NWDT) which was constituted in 1969. The task of the NWDT was to deliberate on the complaint filed by the Gujarat government under the Inter-State Water Dispute Act, 1956. Gujarat claimed a larger share of Narmada water on the basis of its projected needs. The NBS was initially associated in articulating the demands of the Madhya Pradesh (MP) government, as it strongly defended the rights of the MP, to exclusively utilise the Narmada water. Apart from dealing with issues of water sharing, it also raised the displacement issue and submergence of fertile land. Thus in the 1970s, amongst the many points raised were danger of earthquakes, increased silting, displacement of tribals, farmers, backward classes and castes leading to their unemployment and impoverishment. The thrust of the opposition was thus was on submergence of land for the sake of power generation in Gujarat, which was directed towards benefiting the industrial class (Letter to NWDT, 1974 cited in Sangvi, 2000).

The need for focussed lobbying was perceived in 1979 when the NWDT declared its award. As per the award, Madhya Pradesh was allocated 18.25 million acre feet (MAF), Gujarat 9 MAF, Rajasthan 0.50 MAF and Maharashtra –0.5 MAF. The tribunal also announced the heights of two dams—the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) (455 ft) and the Narmada Sagar Project (860 ft), proposed to be built in the Narmada Valley. The award not only triggered riparian claims for a fair share of water, as per the catchment area but also highlighted issues related to submergence of land, loss of biodiversity and displacement. Madhya Pradesh in particular resisted the tribunal decision, considering it a well thought out strategy by the Gujarat government to claim its share on waters which was appropriately the right of the state.

It was in response to this award that the movement in the Narmada Valley gained fresh momentum in late-1970s. While submergence of fertile land was the main agenda of the movement, the movement soon became an extension between political parties to gain influence amongst the masses (Sangvi, 2000: 19). However with Congress coming to power in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, a confidential agreement was signed in 1981, according to which the states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh agreed to explore the possibilities of mitigating hardships of the displaced persons (ibid.). Amongst other developments, the World Bank started evincing interest in the project, and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry was constituted in 1981.

Along with these developments, simultaneously a collective movement against large dams had started taking shape. In 1983, Kalpvriksha published a report on costs imposed by dams. Meanwhile social activists in Gujarat raised the issue of tribal rights and also bureaucrats involved in negotiations with the World Bank.
questioned the viability of dams. In the late-1980s, other non-governmental organisations such as SETU, MARG and ARCH Vahini joined hands against the struggle. Post-1985, mass mobilisation by the NBA at the grass root level, created awareness against the costs imposed by large dams. The movement took an activist stand against displacement, submergence, resettlement and dams. The movement generated mass support questioning the government to provide more information on the dams. Mobilisation through padayatras, village level meetings and ground surveys of the project-affected people were undertaken, in order to counter the pro-dam arguments of the government. Meanwhile legislative instruments were also employed to challenge the information curtailed by the state on such issues. Meanwhile many government functionaries also opposed the feasibility of large dams. Important ones included Chief Secretary, K. C. S. Acharya, Chief Engineer Matin Ahmed, former irrigation Secretary, R. L. Gupta and former Irrigation Minister, Ramchandra Singh Deo. The fact that all of them opposed the feasibility of the dam, its height and the tribunal decision gave legitimacy to the stand taken by the movement. The debate was thus broadened from mere displacement and riparian claims to the consequences of development. For instance Gandhians and Socialists, especially the intellectuals opposed the building of dams on the basis of social and political analyses (Sanghvi 2000: 44–48). Some of the important personalities included Aruna Asaf Ali, P. N. Haskar, C. Subramaniam, Mrinalini Sarabai. I. K. Gujral, Romilla Thappar, Irfan Habib, Rajni Kothari, Deepak Nayar, Shripad Dharmadhikary, Himanshu Thakkar, etc. Moreover the support of the movement itself had spread to Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, Indore, Bhopal, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Rajasthan.

At the international level, the discourse on rights was getting visibility. In 1951 a United Nations Report, *Measures on Economic Development for Underdeveloped Countries*, underlined the need to expand the development paradigm and recognise the rights of the marginalised irrespective of caste, creed and colour. The Brandt and Palme Commissions of 1980 and 1983 further linked development goals to peace and security thus underlining the linkage between removal of poverty and comprehensive security. It was amidst these emerging discourses that the linkage between dams and development was first noticed when in 1984 Nicholson Hildyard and Edward Goldsmith framed the issue of dams in terms of rights-based development. Linkage between rights and development was further established by the UN Declaration on Rights to Development in 1986, which stated that ‘people are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social and political development in which all fundamental rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised’.

In order to create international pressures, the NBA lobbied at the international level. For instance, three of its activists testified at a special hearing of the US Congress Sub-Committee on Natural Resources, Agricultural Resources and Environment, which followed up the hearing by urging the Bank to reconsider its
involvement with the SSP. Similarly Finland and Japan have also rallied around the NBA advocacy efforts and played an important role in turning down the funding for large dam projects to the World Bank. With these developments, the project had been delayed, with the World Bank announcing an independent review the project. The report stated that,

the Sardar Sarovar Projects as they stand are flawed, that resettlement and rehabilitation of all those displaced by the Projects is not possible under prevailing circumstances, and that the environmental aspects of the projects have not been considered or adequately addressed. Moreover, we believe that the bank shares the responsibility with the borrower for the situation that has developed. (Independent Review, 1992, cited in Fisher, 1992: 6)

After the release of Morse Committee Report, the Indian government withdrew from the loan agreement. As events followed, the NBA decided to file a PIL against the dam. The construction of the dam was stopped in 1995 and the Supreme Court endorsed the suspension of the work in May, 1995.

Thus domestic mobilisation was one of the key factors in stopping the dam work. Also leadership at the national level was able to gather the critical mass for sustaining opposition to the project. By 1995 the project had been delayed and the NBA had been effective in stalling the work of the dam, despite strong opposition from the vested groups and the Gujarat government.

The Second Phase

The second phase started with concerted international lobbying, which the NBA undertook while negotiating the dams commission along with some key organisations such as the International Rivers Network (IRN) and Berne Declaration. The World Commission on Dams (WCD) was formed following a meeting of diverse dam-related stakeholders in the early 1997, to discuss the past and future of large dams. Three events shaped the consultation process of the WCD and the NBA played a critical role in all three. First, in June 1994, a coalition of 326 social movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from 44 countries around the world endorsed a statement calling for a moratorium on the World Bank’s funding of large dams. This statement named the Manibeli Declaration demanded that the World Bank should set up an independent comprehensive review of Bank funded large dam projects to establish the actual costs, including the direct and indirect, economic, environmental and social costs, and the actual realised benefits of each project. Second, the Manibeli Declaration expedited the process and brought the issue of dams into the controversial public domain, as James Wolfenson decided to take a review of development effectiveness of large dams. Also as the review was being finalised, the Operation Evaluation Department of the World Bank began negotiations with the International Union for the
Conservation of Nature (IUCN), on co-hosting a workshop to discuss their findings on the basis of an agreement negotiated with the World Bank, which was signed in 1994. Robert Picciotto, Director General of Operation Evaluation of the World Bank and George Greene, Assistant Director General of IUCN, were given overall responsibility for the workshop. Reporting to them were Achim Steiner, who was IUCN’s liaison officer to the World Bank and Andres Liebenthal who had led the Office of Economic Development (OED) desk review. The third important development was the Curitaba Declaration which called for an international independent commission on large dams. Initiated in March 1997, in Curitaba, Brazil where the first International Meeting of the People Affected by Large Dams, was held. The Curitaba Declaration (1997) was a joint statement by affected people’s groups and focused on the increasing gap between the promised and the actual benefits of large dams. Highlighting the need for public participation and transparency in development and implementation of energy and water policies it called for the need to assess the social and environmental costs of large dams thus demanding that a comprehensive review of large dams be held (Declaration of Curitaba, 1997).

Thus the Gland Workshop, which finally laid the edifice of the WCD, brought together 39 participants representing governments, the private sector, international financial institutions, civil society organisations and affected people’s groups. (WCD, 2000: 27). With the Manibeli Declaration, OED Review and the Curitaba Declaration, the mobilisation of the anti-dam campaigns at the international level had taken place and a platform was set to negotiate the dam debate within the socio-economic and environmental framework.

The negotiations on the WCD can be divided into two broad phases. The first relates to the formation of the WCD, which was negotiated by different stakeholders in the Gland Workshop and the second relates to the final report released in 2000, which drew a broad framework, thus providing guidelines for dams and development. The following pages will briefly flag-off the main consensus points which emerged in the two phases and will then delve into the official response of India to the findings. While the consensus points in the first two phases will help throw light on the negotiation outcome, focus on the official response would enable one to analyse the impact of negotiation outcome in determining the state response at national level.

**The Negotiation Phases**

The most important development in the Gland Workshop was the creation of an informed database to generate debate on the different facets relating to dams and development. The background information, as it was called consisted of independent overviews of experienced of industrialised countries in three key thematic areas: engineering and economic, social and stakeholder issues and environmental sustainability. The broadening of definition of dams in context to
the development debate thus helped creating the basic framework for deliberations. The points which emerged from the discussions were:

1. A conscious understanding of complex technical, environmental and social issues is needed and that there is a clear trade-off between the benefits gained against losses.
2. Acknowledgement of increased public interest as a result of campaigns by non-governmental organisations and identifying that public consultation is important in screening projects.
3. Need for technological development, which can make planning, and construction projects more efficient.
4. A periodic review of safety aspects of large dams every 10 years.
5. The urgency to look into social aspects of large dams, which have been underplayed and a shift to reassuring that local people become project beneficiaries.
6. A need to make hydroelectric dams environmentally sustainable in contrast to the use of coal for energy needs.

With this understanding the proponents and opponents of large dams gathered in Gland to contribute insights into environmental policy making. The actors involved were aware of the respective pay-offs and tradeoffs by engaging in the negotiation. For multi-lateral institutions and industry groups, Gland was a place where alternatives could be charted for dam effectiveness. Also the forum in Gland provided a legitimate forum for the financers of large dams to have a dialogue with dam opponents who were scathing on their criticism refusing to compromise with the dam-building industry. For the dam opponents, the states in specific, Gland provided an opportunity to articulate their views in an international forum, so that a consensus could emerge on the social and environmental aspects of large dams. Dharamadhikary points out that for states the expectation and the incentive was that they would get a report that would be a blanket endorsement of dam building (personal communication with Shripad Dharmadhikary, 2007). For the affected people’s groups’ on the other hand it provided an opportunity to engage with the leading funders of large dams. Also the possibility that some sort of review of dams would be undertaken was the major incentive (personal communication with Shripad Dharmadhikary, 2007). Peter Bosshard points out that the main reason for the proponents and opponents to come to common table was the belief of each actor that they were on the right side. Thus the process involved ‘risks’ for the advocacy groups, the industry and the World Bank (personal communication with Peter Bosshard, 2007).

After intense negotiations over the form and structure of the commission, the basic framework for the guidelines on dams was negotiated. The final outcome was influenced by strong lobbying undertaken by the non-governmental organisations. Three strategies can be isolated to describe the diplomatic practice adopted during the negotiations. These are: (a) framing of issues; (b) political communication of information; and (c) exercise of leadership by the NBA, Berne.
The close co-ordination of the three lead organisations was the main driver behind the report. The structure of the Commission, where Commissioners were chosen from different areas of life having an expertise in various aspects of dams (economic, social and environmental), with ‘independent minds’, as Bosshard has called it, and the close communication between the international reference group, the secretariat and the commissioners provide important insights to the working of the negotiation output in WCD. The core group therefore provided by the IRN, Berne Declaration and NBA marshalled people, information and evidence in an organised and systematic manner (personal communication with Shripad Dharmadhikary, 2007). Similarly Peter Bosshard revealed in an interview that reasons for the evolution of the framework, which was achieved in the Gland, was its mandate, which focused on inviting experts from different fora, with independent personalities and minds, to a common table. He communicated that due to this strategy the difference of opinions was great as it was not merely a forum of UN agencies and World Bank. It was a platform of NGOs, their institutions and people of reputation. A major reason for holding this framework together was the role of the IUCN, which had the trust of participants as the ‘neutral moderator’ (personal communication with Peter Bosshard, 2007).

An important communication tool used by non-governmental organisations was the World Wide Web and telephonic conversations between the key leaders at the initial stages. This helped in close co-ordination amongst the various leaders. At the time of Gland as Bosshard pointed out very few anti-dam campaigns were visible—the IRN, the Berne Declaration and the NBA were the visible ones (personal communication with Peter Bosshard, 2007). This statement by Bosshard is reflective of the accessibility factor of non-governmental organisations at the international level, in the first instance for the mobilisation to happen. The WCD was perhaps the kick start for the process. Communication in the form of close co-ordination was therefore the formula in the early stages. Also trust, working on the same terms, co-ordination of work on a weekly basis and good strategic thinking and hard work with facts and data was what helped the process to start in the initial stages (personal communication with Peter Bosshard, 2007).

The main findings of the report were as follows.

### Economic Performance of Large Dams

#### Scheduled Delays and Cost Over Runs

Taking into account both the external and internal costs of dams, the report highlighted a marked tendency of large dams towards scheduled delays and cost overruns (WCD, 2000: 39). Another important conclusion made by the dam commission was the cost variation between multi-purpose dams vis-a-vis single-purpose projects. Four causes, which were highlighted for the poor performance of dams, were:
1. Poor development of technical and cost estimates and supervision by sponsors.
2. Technical problems that arose during construction.
3. Poor implementation by suppliers and contractors.
4. Changes in external conditions (economic and regulatory).

The report also brought to light the contradictions between facts reported by multi-lateral funding agencies such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank and the thematic reviews presented to the WCD. The assessment of irrigation dams by the report was mixed, and it concluded that

while there is considerable variability in performance, such schemes have all too often fallen short of physical targets and failed to recover their costs in cases where that was the intention indicated in the project document. Further, it stated that in many cases the economic justification for the approval of the project had not been borne out by actual experience in implementation and operation due to cost overruns and shortfalls in net benefits of agricultural production. (WCD, 2000: 49)

Similarly on hydropower dams, the report concluded that though dams on an average met expectations for delivery of power the primary concern was that the ability of the project to deliver energy for its primary purpose of planned four hours was considerably less than expected in the dry season, leading to questions regarding its economic viability (WCD, 2000: 51).

On the role of dams to control floods, the report argued for better integrated flood management strategies in contrast to flood control and overall commented that single-purpose dams are more efficient in delivering benefits than multiple ones. Its conclusion on the technical, financial and economic performance of large dams was that there is a better and continued need for monitoring of technical, economic and financial performance.

**Ecological Impact of Large Dams**

The report classified the ecological impact of large dams into three categories:

1. First-order impacts that involve the physical, chemical and geomorphical consequences of blocking a river and altering the natural distribution and timing of the stream flow.
2. The second-order impact that involves changes in primary biological productivity of the ecosystem including effects on riverine and riparian plant life and on downstream habitat such as wetlands.
3. Third-order impacts that involve alterations to fauna (such as fish) caused by the first-order effects (such as blocking migration) or a second-order effect (such as decrease in the availability of plankton).

The overall comment on the ecological impact of the dams basically revolved around:

1. Impact of reservoirs on terrestrial eco-system and bio-diversity is inversely proportional to the development of existing flora and fauna also leading to increased sedimentation of the concerned area.
2. Emission of Green House Gases (GHG) for large dams and reservoirs: the report estimated that gross emission of reservoirs account for 1 per cent and 28 per cent of the global warming potential of the GHG emissions.
3. Impact of altering the natural flood cycle on downstream flood plains: as storage dams generally alter the natural distribution and the timing of the flow, it adversely affects the natural habitats.
4. Impact of dam on fisheries in upstream, reservoir and downstream areas is again negative as it can result in great fluctuations.
5. Enhancement of eco-system through reservoir creation also has been observed in many cases but the enhancement of the ecosystem has only appeared in select few cases like the Grand Coulee Dam and Kariba Dam.
6. Cumulative impact of dams on the river system is again negative as dams fragment the ecosystem.

Social Impact of Large Dams

The social impact of large dams was associated with the indirect costs accrued by large dams which have indirectly affected the people at large. The socio-economic impact of large dams was seen through the prism of short- and long-term costs and benefits. Where short-term included employment opportunities, long-term risks/costs included threatened livelihood and health care problems specifically amongst the indigenous and the vulnerable groups. The impact of irrigation benefits and its correlation in providing food security was also questioned. For instance drawing from the India case study the report cited, ‘the India case study calculates that the share of the total increase in food production from 1950–1993 is more attributable to additional land brought under irrigation’ (WCD, 2000: 102). Displacement was defined as both livelihood displacement and physical displacement and reported the inadequate resettlement and rehabilitation policies for the project affected. It also stated that no clear definition existed to define who were the real stakeholders affected by the displacement caused by large dams. Also the impact of large dams on gender was mixed as the WCD report cited that dams have served as opportunities for reducing gender disparities primarily among women in households or communities that receive access to project services.
As far as the alternatives for the large dams and decision-making was concerned the report, outlined a need-based approach to identify them and highlighted four focal points in the order: agriculture, water supply, flood management and energy. The options ranged from demand-side management options relating to reduced consumption, recycling and technological policy options that promote water and power efficiency, improving governance related activities relating to the management of dams, ground water recharge methods for irrigation purposes can be used for irrigation purposes. Also the decision-making criteria were based on prior informed consent and participatory approaches to decision-making which are more transparent in nature, which means taking the views of the people displaced. Also strengthening mechanisms for regulatory frameworks was highlighted.

The report next highlighted the way forward, which it suggested, should be based on a rights and a risk approach taking into account the rights violated and long-term risks borne by the affected people. The Commission proposed using United Nations instruments, on human rights and the right to a clean environment and development, as a tool to bridge the gap between its evaluation of past mistakes and in prescription for future. Specifically, the commission evoked the Universal Declaration on the Rights to Development adopted by the UN General Assembly (1986) and the Rio principles at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (1992). The link to UN instruments was highly strategic. This helped turning to values set forth by formal representatives of the people—the member states of United Nations—to ground its recommendations. Further in order to get the process right to ensure legitimacy, the Commission committed to a set of guiding principles for its work programme. These included transparency, inclusiveness, independence and accountability. The dialogue was accomplished through four activities which came to be known as ‘four pillars’ (Navroz, 2001: 70). These were: first, in depth case studies, which helped in illuminating the performance of large dams. Second, a survey of 150 large dams which helped capturing trends in performance. Third, cross-cutting issue papers (thematic reviews) which helped highlighting best practices and recurring problems from around the world, as well as alternatives to large dams in providing water supply, energy and flood control services; and fourth, public consultations were held in all major world regions to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to share their views directly. Thus with this participation of private sector organisations, industry and citizens’ groups—who participated actively, usually with opposing interests—offered differing perspectives to the negotiations on WCD. These differing interpretations resulted in expert policy co-ordination, which further influenced the peaks for WCD negotiations These strategies, as the report pointed out had mixed success in soliciting information from the broader community of stakeholders (WCD, 2000: 351). However, the main leverage, which the WCD negotiations provided, was convincing more people about issues, which the advocacy groups had been raising (personal communication with Shripad Dharmadhikary, 2007).

Social Change, 41, 3 (2011): 397-411
Response to these findings can be effectively explained as those who supported the findings (optimists) and those who negated the findings (pessimists).

The pessimists included—states (government agencies and utilities) and private industry, the Government of Canada, the Ministry of Water Resources, India; South Africa Steering Committee, South Africa; the Nepal Electricity Authority, Nepal; the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works, Turkey and Hydro Review Worldwide, Harza Engineering Company; the industry group which included Harza Engineering, Hydro Quebec, Siemens and Electricité de France and professional associations like International Hydropower Association, etc.

The optimists included the Brazilian Movement of Dam Affected People, Cordillera People’s Alliance, James Bay Cree Nation and the Pimichikamak Cree Nation, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Berne Declaration, Africa Water Network, International Rivers Network, etc.

**Impact at the National Level**

Assessing the outcome and impact of the WCD, it can be said that while the outcome at the international level was effective in framing the debate on dams in inclusive terms, at the national level the impact was limited. Though the thematic reviews and other participatory forums did enhance and facilitate information exchange, lobbying at the national level by the advocacy networks was not really visible. In fact one can point out that though the WCD was a success at the international level in broadly incorporating the social and environmental concerns, it was not so successful in the same at the national level. Peter Bosshard pointed out that: limited time and lack of funds were the main reasons which constrained the outreach activities of the non-governmental actors (personal communication with Peter Bosshard, 2007). The official response of India to the debate thus revolved around some key points:

**The guidelines of report were too generalist and needed to be context specific**

India stated that:

The guidelines for development suggested by WCD in the Final report were wholly incompatible with the Indian development imperatives and therefore it would propose to continue with its programme of dam construction to create another 200 billion cu. metres of storage in the next 25 years so as to ensure continued self-sufficiency in food-grain production and to meet the energy and drinking water needs of a growing population. (Government of India, Ministry of Water Resources, 2001)

The official position also stated that the guidelines for development suggested by WCD were wholly incompatible with the country’s development imperatives.
Report lacked a balanced perspective

The Indian government also rejected the country report prepared by Commission, stating that:

On a detailed perusal of the Final Report it is seen that WCD has leaned heavily on the Consultants Country Report, totally ignoring Government’s views on the report and the data on the successful projects in India furnished by us to WCD. The references relating to India in the Report are not based on factual and authentic information. (Government of India, Ministry of Water Resources, 2001)

Some other critiques of the Indian government were:

Lack of Representation and Structure

The Indian government critiqued the Commission over representation failures. The Ministry of Water Resources (MOWR) questioned the composition of the commission, its procedures, the adequacy and representatives of the sample studies, the knowledge base behind the report and the manner in which report was finalised. The Indian water resources establishment tended to react with dismay to the very idea of the setting up of a World Commission on Dams, which seemed to them a sinister anti-dam move. Second, the establishments’ suspicion and hostility were particularly aroused by the membership of the commission, which include Medha Patkar (whom it regarded as their enemy) and L. C. Jain (whom it considered to be her friend and sympathizer) (Iyer, 2001: 2275).

Lack of engagement and participation at the domestic level

There was an evident lack of participation by the NBA and the government at the domestic level. For instance the Indian government refused allow the Commissioner’s to visit the dam affected sites and facilitate a regional consultation in Bhopal. It was argued that the government would not allow the presence of an international team of experts on Indian soil. Moreover there was a clear lack of consensus on key areas of the report, as there was no clear national position on the role played by large dams and the benefits accrued by them in material terms of water supply and energy generation. Lack of effective mobilisation by the bureaucracy and parliamentary support was also lacking. For instance a day before the Commission’s visit, a delegation headed by the then Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr Keshubhai Patel met the Indian Prime Minister and demanded the permission granted by the Government of India to hold a hearing be withdrawn (Sharma, 1998; Ved, 1998).
Assessment

Evaluating the role played by the NBA in context to dams it can be said that while the NBA has received dramatic success in making the state and the multilateral institutions accountable to policy-making on large dams in general; during the WCD negotiations, it was found that while there was appreciation of issues related to dams and decision-making, domestic response of the state was not very favourable. This raises two important issues. First, where leadership at the international level was successful in shaping the broad contours of the report, at the domestic level, such fervour was missing. The answer perhaps, can best be put in Dharmadhikary’s own words:

In case of India, domestic level actions are far more important. In other countries international advocacy may be more influential. However in the Indian case, where in specific cases there is external support for the project, international advocacy is important. (personal communication with Shripad Dharamadhikary, 2007)

Given these developments therefore it would be no exaggeration to state that the success story of the NBA in India can be traced to the domestic mobilisation it created through various protest marches, campaigns and political pressures against the state governments; much before dams and displacement became an international issue. Based on this observation therefore it can be argued that though consensus on norms at the international level is important, political will which should be the main criterion for assessing the negotiation success is determined by influencing domestic political structures, often manifested in political power and interest groups. It can also be concluded that the entry point to development discourses can be most effective by exercising advocacy at the domestic level and certainly not at a trans-national or the international level.

The Way Forward

Based on the case study analyses of the NBA, certain conclusions can be made for the social movements in influencing state response/behaviour. This is particularly relevant to development issues, which are often debated at the national level and the state is the main actor which can be made accountable for the issues. As non-governmental actors have become important players in contemporary diplomatic practice because of their reach and articulation of issues at the international level, three strategies need to be kept in mind.

1. The first strategy is the framing of the issue in inclusive terms and mobilisation of key actors at the national level.
2. The second strategy is political communication and distribution of information at the international level.
3. The third strategy is employment of effective leadership at the national and international level.

Notes

1. The Manibeli Declaration was named in recognition of one of the first tribal villages.
2. The Director General of IUCN, David Mc Dowell, initiated this agreement in 1994. His aim was to seek strategic partnerships with key international agencies so that they might work together to resolve controversial issues and meet joint interests.
3. Engelbertus Oud and Terence C. Muir, both associated with engineering and large dam projects were commissioned to write the first paper on Engineering and Economic Aspects of large dams. The second paper was commissioned to Thayer Scudder, a professor of Anthropology on Social Aspects of large Dams and the third paper was commissioned to Robert Goodland, who was an environmental advisor to the World Bank. Goodland focuses on Environmental Sustainability in the Hydro Industry. Two published papers of Anthony Churchill were also reproduced. The papers were on financing developmental challenges. Churchill was a senior advisor to the Washington International Energy Group.
4. A detailed analysis on the negotiations is available in the doctoral thesis by Medha Bisht. The title of the thesis is ‘Multi-Stakeholder Negotiations on Security and Development: A Comparative Case Analyses of World Commission on Dams and Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Treaty’, Diplomatic Studies Division, Centre for International Politics, Organisation and Disarmament (CIPOD), School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2010.

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