



China Three Gorges Project

China is moving from a centralised economy to one where individual enterprise is encouraged and this entails extensive development of infrastructure to support industry and trade. The development includes dams for irrigation, flood control and electrical power. Three hundred major dams are under construction in China at present, the largest is the Three Gorges Dam. This dam has attracted much criticism abroad because of the numbers to be re-settled and for the environmental damage it will cause. Several BDS members have visited the project and spoken with Chinese colleagues about it. All agreed that having seen the project for themselves changes most of the negative perspectives that commentaries from the 'west' had engendered about it.

Over one million people are to be re-settled, but they live along a reservoir 660 kilometres (400 miles) long, and many will be moved from the lower parts of the towns sited infrequently along the steep banks of the Yangtze River to comfortable new apartments on higher ground. Little agricultural land will be lost (the slopes along the Gorges are too steep). The Chinese re-settlement law requires that those resettled should have prospects of a better life in their new situation than their former one. The main environmental impact will visual. The spectacular Three Gorges will be less high, but they will remain high and spectacular.

The primary benefit is flood management. Fifteen million people will be protected against the flood with a 1:1,000 chance of occurrence in any year. Currently the 1:5 year flood overtops the flood banks downstream. In 1998, 1,562 people were drowned, and 197,000ha of farmland inundated. Economic losses amounted to 200 billion Yuen (US\$25 billion), about the cost, including interest and financing charges, of constructing the project, including the re-settlement costs. Other benefits include hydropower generation. The installed capacity will be 18,200 MW, the world's largest hydropower plant, equivalent to one third of the installed total capacity in UK. There will also be navigation benefits, about 50 million tonnes of extra freight will be transported along the river each year.

For an account of a visit to the project, see [ICOLD Beijing Three Gorges Project report](#). If you would like BDS to do a presentation on the Three Gorges Project (or another dams topic) to your organisation, please contact bds@ice.org.uk.