

## Book Review

Scheumann, W., and O. Hensengerth. 2014. *Evolution of Dam Policies: Evidence from the Big Hydropower States*. Heidelberg: Springer.

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In December 2000, the World Commission on Dams (WCD) proposed a new framework for decision-making which has since become an international benchmark for sustainable dam-related practices. International norms of this nature are inevitably controversial, perhaps even more so when they are established to address such controversial projects.

In their edited book *Evolution of Dam Policies: Evidence from the Big Hydropower States*, Scheumann and Hensengerth ask a question that troubles scholars of international policy and governance, and policy makers alike: what is the status and influence of international environmental and social norms? The books tackles this question by further asking: have international norms for sustainability reached emerging markets?

The introductory chapter provides an excellent overview of the state of the art on norm diffusion, highlighting key tensions and opportunity. Building on this literature, three hypotheses are presented and then used to frame the research design:

1. **International Embeddedness:** A country's embeddedness in global politics and its efforts to be or become a global player has repercussions for its decision whether or not its government refers to (dam-related) international norms and standards not only rhetorically but in practice.
2. **Social Mobilization:** In countries where there is a thriving civil society and the action they take is tolerated, it will be able to diffuse international social and environmental standards in policy and in practice through various combinations of information, symbolic politics, leverage, and accountability politics.
3. **Reliance on Foreign Financial Services and Technology:** If the implementation of national dam programmes, or projects, relies on international financial services and expertise, both international financial institutions and business corporations can act as norm carriers and standard setters.

Four country studies were selected with the aim of examining processes of change within emerging economies that are important regional and/or global players. Specifically, the book focuses on cases involving Brazil, China, India and Turkey. These cases represent important sites of inquiry not only because of their increasing economic and political

influence, but also because all four governments rejected the WCD recommendations yet all underwent a series of domestic reform. Focus on emerging economies reiterate that while heated debates have taken place on the impacts and implications of large-scale-hydropower programmes in the global North, these debates have not prevented emerging economies from pursuing such projects. Consideration of the role of these countries (notably China) as “new players” investing in projects in developing countries, the role of civil society as proponents of these norms, and the influence of development cooperation organizations rounds out the analysis and provides broad picture of complex dynamics.

The case studies are rich with legislative and procedural detail and as such provide a careful chronicling of processes related to specific damming projects. This in and of itself provides a useful contribution to scholarship on dam policy. Yet the cases go further by analysing how international and national dynamics interact in and across dam programmes. Attention is given to the impacts and results of these interactions. The compilation of cases presents an opportunity for comparison which serve to highlight the impact and influence of national political systems in the interpretation and application of these norms. As the authors conclude: “It is therefore important to distinguish between different forms of international embeddedness, motivations for engaging with the international community and the importance of domestic governance settings as intervening variables that determine the domestic outcomes of international processes” (p 333). This in turn provides direction, not only for the development of future international norms for dams, but also for how to better design and anticipate adoption of such norms at the national level.

As noted above, the chapters in the book give consideration to the role of NGOs as strategic actors in promoting sustainable dam development. Reflections on civil engagement reiterate the importance of context. The chapters also show that there are formal but also informal spaces that civil society actors make use of to advance their positions, reflecting a polycentric model of decision making. Finally, while international norms may not be adopted and implemented at the state-level, they do offer civil society with a tool to further pressure governments and to try to hold actors to account.

The focus on the role of Chinese institutions in the development of projects in Ghana and Cambodia sheds light on shifting geopolitics and raises important questions of the future of norm development in a world no longer dominated by US/Western hegemony but increasingly mediated through formal and informal interactions across level of governance and multiple actor categories. The chapter that considers how the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) has made use of the WCD provides an insightful case of how one Western government agency has taken up and made use of international norms, in this instance by linking them to development initiatives. Like the country case studies, the focus on GIZ and WCD illustrate that international norms are not a one-size fits all blueprint but that sustainability must be tailored to specific contexts and be supported by stakeholders who can provide context, expertise, capacities, and financial resources. This is usefully compared to the role of other international development actors, notably the World Bank, that help to drive international norm diffusion through projects that it funds. At the same time,

as the India case makes clear, the engagement of international actors does not translate to immediate uptake of international norms.

The book is timely: after decades of absence, there is a re-emergence of interest and action in hydropower development, with donors and multilateral development banks framing such programmes as part of a move towards low-carbon energy strategies. Given this, the impact of existing hydropower dams, and the socio-ecological effects of other so-called clean-energy strategies (e.g., biofuels, albeit on a very different scale) the re-emergence and development of large-scale hydropower programmes requires good and strong governance mechanisms, meaningful participation of local actors, particularly those most likely to be impacted, and careful consideration of socio-ecological impacts. This book does not provide direct advice on the creation of pathways towards such government arrangements but it does provide insight into how such processes are unfolding in four countries each marked by rapid change and economic growth and as such this book is an excellent reference not only for scholars of dams and hydropower, but also for anyone interested in the implications of international environmental and social norms on national actions.

