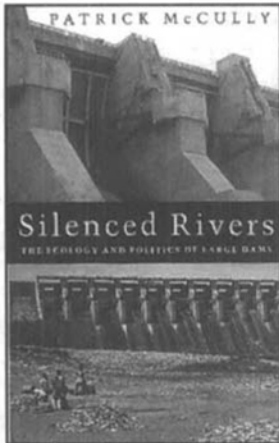


books

Silenced Rivers: The ecology and politics of large dams

Patrick McCully
Zed, London, 1996.
350pp. Pbk. £14.95.
ISBN 1 8564 9436 5



This is a comprehensive challenge to the construction of large dams. The author is Campaigns Director of the California-based International Rivers Network, and associate editor of *The Ecologist*. Since 1992 he has worked with activists in India opposing the building of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River.

His book is aimed at emphasizing the impact of damming rivers, particularly in developing countries, based on scientific, environmental, social, and economic evidence. After a brief introductory history, the environmental effects are discussed under the heading 'Rivers No More'. This is followed by human consequences under the heading 'Temples of Doom'. Then the technical failings of dams are highlighted under the self-explanatory heading 'When Things Fall Apart' and their elusive benefits under the heading 'Empty Promises'. Irrigation problems are outlined under the heading 'Paradise Lost'.

The alternative to large dams is confined to a single chapter on the wise use of watersheds, including land management to protect and restore water resources, conserving underground sources, and utilizing optimum irrigation systems to avoid waste.

Both large and small hydro-electric schemes are then criticized as being potentially harmful to river flows, and for causing the resettlement of huge numbers of people. The author suggests that harmless 'new renewable

technologies may be developed which may not yet have been guessed at' and, meanwhile, advocates strict control of demand for hydro- or fossil-electricity.

The penultimate chapter is devoted to the political economy of damming. Lists of major corporations and of major funders in the international dam industry are included under the sub-heading 'Technocrats without a Cause: Dam-building bureaucracies'. Here McCully names the dams with which each organization has been involved.

The final chapter, 'We Will Not Move', summarizes the aims and justification of the international anti-dam movement. There are copious references notes for each chapter, with an appendix of dams which have involved forced resettlement.

From the reviews of the hardback edition of *Silenced Rivers* it is apparent that it is being endorsed as a definitive work for the anti-dam movement. Accordingly, it should be read by all involved in their construction. There is no doubt that many lessons on sustainability have been learned from the long history of dam building. The major shortcomings of this critique are the only very brief discussion of alternatives, and the limited credit given to the manifold advantages of many dams.

Charles Kerr

The Community-Managed Sanitation Programme in Kerala: Learning from experience

K. Balachandra Kurup
IRC/SEU, The Hague, 1996.
80pp. Pbk. £6.50/£4.50 in South.

In his foreword, P.K. Sivanandan, Commissioner and Secretary for Rural Development in Kerala, recounts how the 1991 Census found that more than 50 per cent of the population had access to latrine facilities; some districts having nearly 65 per

cent coverage — and less than 10 per cent were constructed with Government sponsorship or subsidy.

Also in 1991, a survey carried out by the Kerala Water Authority found that only 40 per cent of the people had access to safe water. The bulk of the population in rural areas still has to depend on unsafe sources such as open wells and tanks; many contaminated from improperly constructed latrines.

For the last nine years, SEU, Kerala's Socio-Economic Unit, has tackled this problem by promoting well chlorination, and cost-effective latrines, with the full involvement of the community.

This publication is significant as one of relatively few comprehensive descriptions of an Asian experience with community-managed sanitation programmes. Learning from experience was a major thrust of the programme. The sharing of this programme's strategies, approaches and experiences, therefore, should be of use to all those interested and involved in community-based social development.

The collection of papers begins with the SEU programme's background. The policy frameworks at the national and state level are reviewed, along with their implications for implementation of community-based strategies. This is followed by strategies and the historical development of the SEU programme. Full-scale implementation, community organization, school sanitation, and community monitoring are then described, before costs, cost-containment mechanisms and local financing are examined. Next comes a focus on results, human capacity building and gender, after which ongoing experiments, design and operation, women masons and participatory techniques are described. Finally, the potential for sustainability, replication, self-reliant coverage, maintenance, use and institutional integration in the future are described.

PROJECTED VALUES OF EXPECTATION OF LIFE AT BIRTH (INDIA & KERALA)				
PERIOD	INDIA		KERALA	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1980 (base year)	54.1	54.7	64.2	69
1981-1986	55.6	56.4	65.2	69.9
1986-1991	58.1	59.1	66.2	71.1
1991-1996	60.6	61.7	67.2	72.4
1996-2001	62.8	64.2	68.2	73.6

A table from the IRC book shows actual and projected life expectancy in Kerala.