

Preface

Following a rise in civil society protests and a reorientation of development paradigms towards environmental sustainability, large dams fell out of favour in the developed North in the 1990s. At the same time, international organisations started to codify a range of international norms pertaining to good environmental and social practices for the construction and operation of dams, including the World Bank's Operational Policies, the Equator Principles, the OECD Common Approaches and the International Finance Corporation's Performance Standards. Their aim is to mitigate the negative impacts of large dams on the environment and local communities.

However, the critical debates in the North have not prevented emerging and developing countries from pursuing large-scale hydropower programmes. Moreover, many of the emerging economies have also questioned the relevance of the above-mentioned international norms. China in particular has rejected the universal applicability of norms that contradict its system of governance. Brazil, China, India and Turkey have all argued that these norms might impede their economic and social development.

This raises the question about the status that international environmental and social norms have in emerging economies that have large dam-building programmes and that support dam construction in third countries. The studies on Brazil, China, India and Turkey in this volume seek to understand the extent to which these norms are relevant in emerging countries, how local norms in these countries interact with international norms and what the results of this interaction are. Furthermore, studies on China's involvement in Ghana and Cambodia investigate the interaction between Chinese actors and the respective host governments.

The cases show that each country has relevant laws in place, and that the development of these laws is a result of both domestic policy-learning and international influences. However, the studies also find that the political system in each country determines the way in which norms are interpreted and applied. As such, this book offers important clues as to the future of international environmental and social norms for large dams.

In the meantime, after decades of abstinence, multilateral development banks and donors are re-engaging in hydropower development as a step towards promoting low-carbon strategies. The studies collected in this book show that the

environmental and social downsides of hydropower are yet to be adequately addressed and managed. And they show that there is some evidence of policy-learning in dam-related policies that might offer important hints for future dam projects.

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