



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

# Chinese Hydropower: Damning Tibet's Culture, Community, and Environment

For the full report and interactive map: <https://savetibet.org/chinese-hydropower>

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) hydropower expansion in Tibet is accelerating human rights violations, environmental destruction, and geopolitical instability. Tibet's rivers, which supply water to nearly 1.8 billion people downstream across China, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, are being dammed at an unprecedented pace and scale, threatening regional water security, food systems, livelihoods, and unique cultural heritage. Hydropower in Tibet is an especially toxic cocktail because the region is vulnerable to climate change and earthquakes.

The PRC justifies its hydropower scheme as a beneficial clean energy solution. Facts bely this claim. **Hydropower creates climate pollution, displaces Tibetan communities, demolishes cultural and religious sites, and deepens political tensions between China and its neighbors.** Rather than advancing sustainable development, China's dam-building reinforces state control and military influence while locking the region into an unsustainable energy future. Immediate international engagement is essential to shift toward genuine and low-cost renewable alternatives like solar and wind, which can safeguard human rights, ecological stability, and regional security.



## SCALE AND SCOPE OF HYDROPOWER CONSTRUCTION

China has rapidly expanded its hydropower infrastructure agenda in Tibet. At least 193 hydropower dams are already operating or planned. The scale and scope of hydropower construction in Tibet is unprecedented but consistent with China's affinity for mega-engineering projects. These projects reflect a utilitarian view of nature and seek to project state power.

- **80% of all Dams are Classified as Large (>100MW) or Mega Dams (>500MW):** The largest, the Motuo Dam, now underway, will be three times China's Three Gorges Dam (60,000 MW).
- **60% Remain in the Proposal or Preparation Stage:** This indicates opportunities to halt further harm if action is taken now.
- **Prioritizing Energy Over Environment and Cultural Heritage:** The concentration of projects in southeastern Tibet, especially along the upper reaches of the Yangtze River and its tributaries, reflects the prioritization of energy generation over ecological and cultural preservation.
- **Export Driven:** The massive energy production capacity is not intended for Tibetan communities. The goal is to power China's eastern and central industrial zones thousands of miles away, and in the long-run south-east Asian countries.

## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Hydropower projects produce high and concentrated costs which disproportionately fall on Tibetan communities. Hydropower dams forcibly displace Tibetans from their traditional lands and homes and destroy unique tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

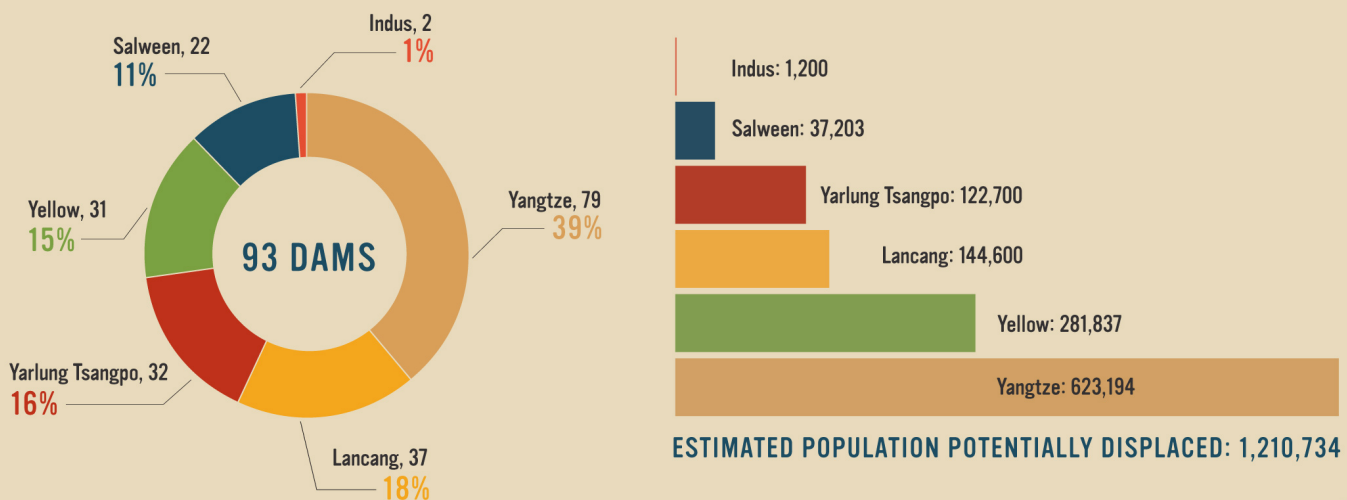
- **Population Expulsion:** If completed, China's plan would expel approximately 1.2 million people.
- **Zero Community Input:** The Tibetan people are denied the ability to influence decisions that directly impact every aspect of their lives. This violates the core principle of free, prior, informed consent. Any calls for negotiation or legal recourse are labelled as separatism and swiftly silenced.
- **Cultural Erasure:** Sacred sites and cultural heritage are being systematically destroyed. The Lianghekou Dam expelled over 7,500 residents and demolished several monasteries. The Khamtok (Gangtuo) Dam plans to forcibly displace over 4,200 residents and destroy six monasteries, including Wontoe Monastery, which houses 14th-century Buddhist murals of enormous cultural significance.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

Dams disrupt healthy river systems vital to downstream countries, destroy fragile ecosystems, and increase the risk of landslides and earthquakes.

- **Water Scarcity Risks:** As glaciers continue to melt due to climate change, China's damming projects will further exacerbate water scarcity throughout the region, particularly for downstream countries.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** Dams damage vulnerable and biodiverse ecosystems by flooding land, reducing water quality and flow, and interrupting the flow of soil, nutrients and aquatic life.
- **Natural Disasters:** Hydropower dams can both cause and be structurally vulnerable to landslides, earthquakes, and flash floods in this seismically active region.

## HYDROPOWER BASES & POTENTIAL DISPLACEMENT BY RIVER



## CLIMATE IMPACTS AND ALTERNATIVES

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- **Hydropower is not clean energy:** Dam reservoirs release large, upfront methane emissions, a greenhouse gas pollutant 80 times more potent than carbon.

- **Hydropower Vulnerability:** Climate change-induced glacier melt and erratic precipitation patterns reduce hydropower's reliability and long-term economic viability.
- **Sustainable Alternatives:** Solar and wind energy reduce pollution, support co-management models that facilitate Tibetan pastoral practices, while providing local clean energy and economic opportunity.

## REGIONAL STABILITY AND SECURITY RISKS

China's aggressive hydropower expansion not only harms Tibetans but also jeopardizes regional peace.

- **Geopolitical Manipulation:** China withholds hydrological data to pressure downstream countries during political disputes, such as during the 2017 Doklam border crisis with India.
- **Coercion:** China is positioned to leverage its hydro power infrastructure investment to influence diplomatic negotiation and other regional processes with downstream countries.
- **Dual-Use Infrastructure:** Hydropower projects are strategically designed to enhance China's military capabilities in Tibet. Dam related roads and infrastructure easily serve military installations, deployment, and facilitate cross-border settlements aimed at consolidating China's control over the region.

### CHINA MUST:

- Cease all planning, proposing, and construction of large-scale hydropower dams within Tibet.
- Stop all forcible displacement of communities.
- Protect the right of Tibetans to participate in all development projects as per the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development.
- Ensure the right to free, prior, and informed consent of impacted communities.
- Invest in properly sited and inclusively developed solar and wind power, as they do not carry the demonstrable costs of hydropower. Projects should prioritize co-benefits that facilitate maintenance of traditional ways of life.

The violation of the rights of Tibetans is a result of the occupation of Tibet which contravenes the Tibetan people's right to self-determination. Thus, the ability to freely utilize their natural wealth and resources must be part of a political solution which can only be achieved through dialogue between the representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government.

