benefits. Its imposition and negative impact on indigenous communities, particularly on the Chakmas -- which amounts to nothing less than a cultural genocide, long rationalised as an inevitable price of "progress" and "development," raises the question of the moral legitimacy of such projects.

Constructed (1957-1963) under the Pakistani government, funded by USAID, the project uprooted some 100,000 tribal people, including 18,000 families -- of which 70 percent were Chakma. Over 400 square miles of land was submerged under water, including 40 percent of all the fertile agricultural land in the CHT area. The tragic and unjust legacies of the project, including its failed rehabilitation and compensation promises, continue to linger in the political and social tension which so characterize the area even to this day.

In Bangladesh, once again, such a scenario is unfolding at Phulbari in Dinajpur district, with multi-national corporate, donor-driven proposals for coal mining in the region.

The Kaptai hydro-electric project is also a warning that even a renewable energy project will have to be planned and implemented holistically through proper human, ecological, social and moral considerations.

Such warnings come from other large hydro-electric dams around the world, as well. It's against such destructive consequences that opposition to the Hydro-Quebec in Canada, the Kinzua Dam on the upper Allegheny River in Pennsylvania, the Mahaveli Dam in Sri Lanka, the Narmada Dam project of a series of large hydro-electric dams on the Narmada River in India, the Kaptai Dam project on Karnaphuli River in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area in Bangladesh, the proposed Tipaimukh Dam project in Manipur State of India, and other large scale hydro-electric dams has surfaced.

Large hydro-electric dams used to be considered one of the cheapest ways to generate power. Assessing them holistically and counting the externalities, they have now been proven to be disastrous -- environmentally, culturally, economically and, not the least, morally.[10]

A concern is also growing over possible connections between large hydro-electric dams and earthquakes. On the one hand, earthquakes can break a dam, and on the other, by exerting enormous pressure on the earth's surface, large dams can also cause earthquakes, both with catastrophic consequences. Scientists of varied disciplines are beginning to investigate these connections. With aging large dams, more dams in the pipeline, and a growing number of earthquakes around the world, their findings must be taken seriously.[11]

The battle against large scale hydro-electric dams is still a battle against the tide. Fortunately, however, the opposition is growing and there's also been a growing trend towards smaller, ecologically balanced, hydro-electric systems. Genuine progress and development do not have to be at the expense of equity and social justice. What cannot be undone can certainly serve as a guideline for future projects.

The negative impacts of large hydro-electric dams are so reminiscent of the impacts of other large energy projects -- coal, natural gas, uranium -- have had around the world. In Bangladesh, once again, such a scenario is unfolding at Phulbari in Dinajpur district, with multi-national corporate, donor-driven proposals for coal mining in the region. It's happening in spite of growing opposition from environmentalists, geologists, activists, and local people -- including indigenous communities which have thrived there for ages and who have vowed to "die in order to protect our homeland."

Prof. Anu Muhammad, economist and general secretary of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources and Ports -- leading the national opposition has said: "The proposed 'development' project is merely a scheme to loot natural resources from a poor country for the rich. We will not allow GCM Resources (the recent new name of Asia Energy) to turn a land of food for the people into a black hole for corporate profit."

There have already been extensive propaganda, intimidation, attacks, and casualties.[12] In August 2006 security forces opened fire and