

# **Drought, Climate Change, and the Political Economy of Himalayan Dam-Building**

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Both North China and North India have made impressive agricultural gains over the last 50 years, but the irrigation essential to those gains required unsustainable amounts of groundwater extraction; both now face crises as those aquifers are depleted. Today, both countries are contemplating massive river diversion efforts to address these shortages: from South to North in China (already underway) and from East to West in India. These schemes have complex implications for the Himalayas plateau – the source of most of the rivers in question, as well as others that are vital to other countries (eg. the Mekong). Meanwhile, a combination of energy needs, growing technical and financial capabilities, and complicated political forces are also accelerating dam building for hydro-electric power in the Himalayas; and last but not least, it is becoming increasingly clear that climate change has very serious implications for both Himalayan glaciers and annual precipitation in the mountains. This paper looks at the interlocking forces behind planned and actual Himalayan mega-projects, with special attention to China -- which, because of geography and the ability to self-finance its large projects, is the most important single actor in this critical situation.