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## [India: The Dandeli dam project scandal](#)

Dam megaprojects worldwide have proved detrimental to the environment and to local communities, who directly bear the brunt of their consequences. Frequently corrupt practices are adopted by governments, consulting firms and companies --all interested in the realization of such projects-- to go ahead with them. This is what happened with the Dandeli dam project in India.

During August-September 2000 the Indian NGO Environment Support Group denounced the "worst case of fraud in environmental decision making history in India". The international consulting firm Ernst and Young and Murdeshwar Power Corporation (MPC) --responsible for the Dandeli dam project across the Kali River in Uttara Kannada District-- were directly involved in the scandal. The consulting firm plagiarised the Environmental Impact Assessment used for a previous dam project --that of the Tattihalla Augmentation Scheme prepared by the Institute for Catchment Studies and Environmental Management-- and used it for the Dandeli dam case.

In spite of the fraud, the State environmental authority proceeded to hold the Environmental Public Hearing on 21 August 2000 on the basis of this plagiarised report. During the Hearing even hired thugs representing the developer threatened those who questioned the validity of the process. During a whole month the government of Karnataka refused to accept the facts, but coverly advised MPC to present another EIA for the project to avoid further controversy. Nonetheless this was not the last chapter of the thriller . . .

From September to October 2000 Tata Energy Research Institute --a well known private Indian research agency-- produced what it claimed to be an Environment Impact Assessment, but which in reality was but another farce. It is not believable that the preparation for the field study and the evaluation in the field of a vast area of biodiversity-rich forest, in a region of difficult access because of its topography and during the rainy season can be performed in just a month time. In a letter addressed in December 5th 2000 to Dr. R. K. Pachauri, President of TERI, the Environment Support Group expressed: "Shockingly the study done by TERI is of appalling standards, that do not meet even the poor EIA standards of India. Further, it arrives at conclusions that the dam will not have significant impact on the Dandeli forests without producing any supportive evidence whatsoever. Even the ecological information produced has been found to be 'secondary and spurious' by Dr. Ranjit Daniels, an authority on the biodiversity of the region, who reviewed the EIA on our request.

Implications have been denounced in this shady business. The environmental authorities of Karnataka, and the State's Industries Minister, Mr. R. V. Deshpande, who represents the Dandeli constituency, and is politically close to the project developer Mr. R.N. Shetty, are in an awkward situation. Indian civil society is claiming that the case needs to be brought to court.

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