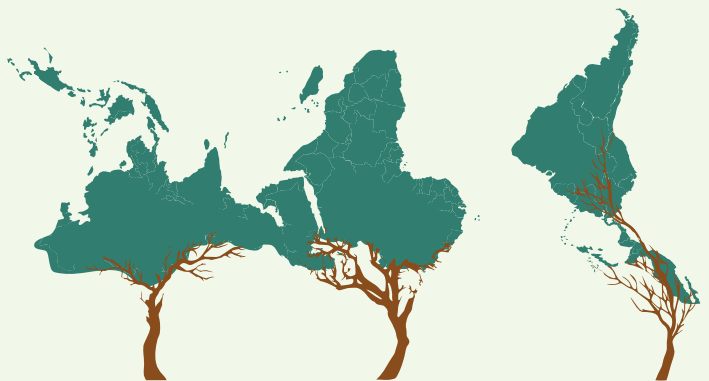


Fighting the Tide

Human Rights and
Environmental Justice
in the Global South



César Rodríguez-Garavito
(Director)

FIGHTING THE TIDE

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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and Environmental Justice
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Rodríguez-Garavito, César (dir.), Caio Borges, Mary Louise Dumas, Richard Ellimah, Karen Hudlet, Eliana Kaimowitz, Arjun Kapoor, Sylvia Kithinji, Gabriela León Cobo, Felipe Milanez, Darshana Mitra, Yamile Eugenia Najle, Rodrigo Magalhaes de Oliveira, Felício Pontes, Jr., Margaretha Quina, Pétalla Brandão Timo.

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Introduction
Human Rights in the
Anthropocene: New Practices
and Narratives on Human Rights
and the Environment
from the Global South

César Rodríguez-Garavito

In 2009, the International Commission on Stratigraphy appointed a group of thirty-five experts from around the world to determine whether we have entered a new geological era. The question was whether the Holocene, an epoch that began 11,700 years ago, has been replaced by the Anthropocene, one marked by profound changes to earth caused by one species alone: humans.

After several studies and discussions, in 2016, the group of scientists reached a nearly unanimous conclusion: we humans are indeed creating (and destroying) a planet in our image and likeness. The scientists recommended that the commission officially declare the existence of the Anthropocene and identify its starting date as the 1950s. They claimed that plastic pollution—in rocks, oceans, and the stomachs of fish and birds—will probably be the most visible footprint that humans leave behind for posterity. Indeed, the fossils of the Anthropocene will contain not traces of our books, our homes, or our monuments, but rather water bottle scraps, container tops, and shreds of grocery bags.

For human rights scholars and practitioners, the Anthropocene presents unprecedented challenges. Extreme environmental degradation (climate change, water scarcity, rapid extinction of species and forests, and uncontrolled pollution) has become one of the most serious threats to human rights. After all, rights do not mean much if what is at risk is life on earth.

We are living on the brink of a possible sixth mass extinction: the demise of thousands of species on account of climate change, coral bleaching due to ocean acidification, or the succumbing of amphibians around the globe. Such an extinction would be the first cataclysm caused by a living species, comparable to

the meteorite that brought the fifth extinction and ended the era when dinosaurs roamed the earth (Kolbert 2015).

To avoid the fate of the dinosaurs, who were caught off guard by the meteorite, today's generation of human rights academics and activists—to which the authors of this book belong—must develop legal, political, research, and narrative strategies that confront the challenges of the Anthropocene and deepen the connections between human rights and environmental justice.

To this end, they can begin by relying on some of the promising innovations currently underway. In terms of *legal and political strategies*, the international human rights system is increasingly moving toward official recognition of a right to a healthy environment. Even though this right has yet to be formally enshrined in an international legal instrument, civil society and state actors have invoked it on the basis of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration that emerged from the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. As this right has been incorporated into one national constitution after the other, it has become a standard component of rights charters, public policies, and litigation in more than half the world's countries (Boyd 2012). And thanks to the recent reports and recommendations of John Knox, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, its international status has been elevated (Knox and Pejan 2017).

Invoking the right to a healthy environment means declaring the importance of an environment amenable to a dignified life (Rodríguez-Garavito 2017). In addition to playing a key role in the enjoyment of other rights, the right to a healthy environment has an intrinsic *moral value*. It provides explicit protection for the basic conditions of individual and community existence that are being threatened each day by growing ecological distress: human beings' relationship with the environment in which they live, the ability to remain in one's habitat and develop a sustainable relationship with the environment, the rights of future generations to enjoy a habitable planet, and even the potential recognition of certain rights for non-human animals and natural bodies. This moral and legal approximation also means giving special consideration to the right to a healthy environment in concrete situations in which claims based on other moral and economic approximations might point in the opposite direction (for example,

utilitarian arguments for the prioritization of short-term economic growth).

Claiming the right to a healthy environment has two implications. From a moral and legal standpoint, it brings the human rights approach in line with the realities of the Anthropocene. From a political standpoint, it aligns with “new earth” politics—the set of discourses and collective mobilization strategies at the local, national, and global levels that is based on the idea that “human bodies and human practices are deeply enmeshed in natural flows and processes” and that “Earth system science establishes the intimate material connectivity of humans across the lines drawn on the Earth by national states” (Deudney and Mendenhall 2016, 54). The future of human rights theory and practice therefore depends on the connections that can be established with strands of biopolitics that conceive of the planet in its entirety—as a “web of life,” in the pioneering words of Alexander von Humboldt (Wulf 2016)—and that oppose forms of nationalist populism that erode both human rights and the environment, whether in India, the United States, Ecuador, or the Philippines.

Environmental activists have been using the human rights language for decades. We only need to recall, for example, Chico Mendes in Brazil, Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria, and members of Greenpeace around the globe. The interlinking of the environment and rights is even tighter in modern movements such as those explored in this book: the indigenous communities that connect their struggle for cultural rights with mobilization against climate change in the Brazilian Amazon and in Mindanao in the Philippines; the rural workers who stand up against industrial agriculture and mining in Ghana, Ecuador, and Mexico; and young urban activists in India and Buenos Aires.

Amphibious Narratives on Human Rights in the Anthropocene

The complexity of the Anthropocene challenges our knowledge and our imagination. “If the Anthropocene can be said to ‘take place’, it does so across huge scales of space and vast spans of time,” writes Robert Macfarlane (2016). “It involves millions of different teleconnected agents, from methane molecules to rare earth metals to magnetic fields to smartphones to mosquitoes.”

Therefore, the Anthropocene requires not just new forms of theory and practice but also new forms of writing that adapt to the decentralized structure of our time. Following the lead of narrative journalists (Kolbert 2015; Vince 2015), human rights academics and practitioners should uncover the global connections within local cases to shed light on the causes and consequences of—and answers to—the activities that affect human rights and the environment.

This book, and the *Dejusticia* initiative that inspired it, seeks to promote such narratives. To that end, it proposes a new type of writing on human rights, one with three specific characteristics. First, the writing is reflective: its authors, who are the very people working in organizations and on the ground, pause to think about the potential, achievements, and limits of their knowledge and their practice.

In this sense, both this book and *Dejusticia*'s larger project, described below, seek to amplify the voices of human rights defenders in academic and practical discussions about the future of the field, which, to date, have tended to be dominated by academic studies. In the spirit of the type of action research that elsewhere I describe as “amphibious research” (Rodríguez-Garavito 2013), the chapters combine the methodological and analytical strengths of academic research with the practical experience of the authors and the organizations and communities with whom they work. The objective is to foster a new hybrid genre that is as robust as it is relevant, and which contributes to maintaining and broadening the window of reflection and discussion within the human rights field and its connection to environmental justice.

Second, the genre of writing proposed in this book is narrative. Partly because of the human rights community's excessive mastery of legal language and knowledge, its preferred mode of writing is that of technical reports and legal briefs. While this genre has enjoyed notable achievements for decades, it has hindered organizations and activists from effectively sharing and communicating the stories that they live and learn about firsthand: those of the victims, of campaigns, of moral dilemmas, of injustices, of victories. Opening the human rights field to other types of actors, knowledge, and audiences means telling these stories—and telling them well. To that end, the contributors in this volume—with the

help of techniques borrowed from fields such as narrative journalism—tell and are part of these stories (Rodríguez-Garavito 2013).

Third, the stories come from the global South, from the countries and regions that have tended to be objects rather than subjects of the knowledge and decisions within the fields of human rights and environmental justice. In this sense, they attempt to respond to the challenges of an increasingly multipolar world and to counteract the organizational, economic, and epistemological asymmetries between the South and North that have limited the effectiveness and legitimacy of the global human rights movement. The authors of the chapters are activist-researchers from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia who belong to human rights organizations and write from this geographic and professional angle to enrich global dialogue on the future of the field.

The Origin and Structure of the Book

This text forms part of a long-term project undertaken by Dejusticia as part of its international work. The project revolves around the Global Action-Research Workshop for Young Human Rights Advocates that Dejusticia organizes each year to foster connections among and train a new generation of action researchers.

The workshop helps participants develop action-research tools, understood as the combination of rigorous research and practical experience in social justice causes. For ten days, Dejusticia brings approximately fifteen participants and ten expert instructors to Colombia for a series of practical and interactive sessions on research, narrative writing, multimedia communication, and strategic reflection on the future of human rights. The aim is to strengthen participants' capacity to produce hybrid-style texts that are at once rigorous and appealing to wide audiences. Participants are selected on the basis of an article proposal, which is then discussed during the workshop and subsequently developed with the help of an expert mentor (one of the instructors) over ten months until a publishable version is achieved, such as the chapters that make up this volume.

The workshop also offers participants the opportunity to take advantage of new technologies and translate the results of their research and activism into diverse formats—from blogs, videos,

and multimedia to social network communications and academic articles. Therefore, in addition to the annual volume comprising participants' texts and instructors' reflections, the workshop produces a blog in Spanish and English that features weekly entries by workshop alumni, written in the style described above. The title of the blog—*Amphibious Accounts: Human Rights Stories from the Global South*—owes itself to the fact that action research is “amphibious” in that its practitioners move seamlessly between different environments and worlds, from academic and political circles to local communities to media outlets to state entities. For those who are dedicated to the promotion of human rights, this often implies navigating these worlds in the global North and South alike.

Each year, the workshop is centered on a particular current issue. In 2014, the topic was the intersections between human rights and environmental justice that I outlined at the beginning of this introduction. In addition to providing coherence to the book and the group of participants, the selected topic determines the workshop site in Colombia—for the sessions are held not in a classroom or convention center but in the middle of the field, in the very communities and places that are witnessing the issue firsthand. For example, the 2014 workshop traveled to the Amazonian border shared by Colombia, Brazil, and Peru, where the fate of the lungs of the planet is being played out.

The structure of this volume reflects that of the workshop. The core section of the book features studies on the mutual overlapping between human rights and environmental justice in countries in the global South, including India, Brazil, Kenya, the Philippines, Ecuador, Indonesia, Argentina, Ghana, and Mexico. Faithful to the spirit and structure of the annual workshop, the last part of the book gathers the reflections of several of the instructors who led sessions during the workshop and acted as mentors during the writing process.

Acknowledgments

A new and long-term initiative such as this one is more than a collective effort—it requires the support of an entire organization. This text and the ongoing commitment that it represents is an institutional effort of Dejusticia that involves, in one way or another,

all of the organization's members. For the unconditional support that Dejusticia's staff have dedicated to this project, and for embodying the hybrid of research and action in their daily work, I extend enormous thanks to all of them.

I am particularly indebted to the colleagues and friends who were co-architects of the 2014 workshop and subsequent publication process. First of all, I would like to thank Meghan Morris, senior researcher at Dejusticia, for having believed in the idea of the workshop from the beginning, when it was a mere dream, and for having dedicated her unparalleled talent, generosity, and commitment to the immense task of ensuring that the workshop, this volume, and the blog became a reality. Eliana Kaimowitz was the workshop's indefatigable facilitator. Nelson Fredy Padilla, Meghan Morris, Coimbra Sirica, Jack Sirica, Diana Rodríguez, Eliana Kaimowitz, Claret Vargas, and Tatiana Andia did a fantastic job serving as mentors during the chapters' writing process.

Finally, any initiative of this nature requires considerable logistical support, which William Morales assumed with an admirable mixture of efficiency, solidarity, and optimism. At the workshop, significant contributions were made by the instructors, many of whom also served as mentors to participants during the subsequent writing process. I therefore extend my deepest thanks to Carlos Andrés Baquero, Diana Rodríguez, Tatiana Andia, Felício Pontes, Felipe Milanez, Rodrigo Uprimny, Nelson Fredy Padilla, Lily La Torre López, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Coimbra Sirica, Jack Sirica, Martín von Hildebrand, and Purabi Bose.

During the publication phase, three colleagues were fundamental. Morgan Stoffregen and Sebastián Villamizar went above and beyond their duties as translators, becoming unwavering allies who made continual improvements, proposed alternatives and ideas, and ensured that a polyphonic manuscript was converted into a coherent and legible whole. Elvia Sáenz, in coordinating Dejusticia's publication process, never ceased to demonstrate precision and creativity.

Both Dejusticia's international program and the workshop and book were made possible thanks to the generous and enduring support of the Ford Foundation. Martín Abregú and Louis Bickford have been essential counterparts in our efforts: beyond coordinating the foundation's financial support, they have served

as partners who are at once sympathetic to and independent from our ideas and initiatives, for which we are enormously grateful.

I would like to conclude by recognizing perhaps the most essential players of all: the activist-researchers who authored the chapters in this volume. Both during and after the workshop, they enthusiastically supported Dejusticia's commitment to action research and took time from their busy lives to reflect, write, revise, and write again. If the space that we created for them is helpful in their work to contribute to a more effective, horizontal, and creative human rights movement, this effort will have been worth it.

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PART ONE: STUDIES

CHAPTER 1
The Role of Financial
Institutions in Promoting
Environmental (In)justice:
The Brazilian Development Bank
and the Belo Monte Dam

Caio Borges
(Brazil)

Editor's note: Before being translated into English, this chapter was translated from Portuguese into Spanish by Mariana Serrano Zala-meá.

Introduction

It was the second week in January 2013—summertime in the Southern Hemisphere. Since 2010, the year I moved to São Paulo, it seems that the first few months of each year have been growing increasingly hotter and drier. Around 2 p.m., I arrived to the Conectas office, which is located on a busy avenue in downtown São Paulo, Brazil’s wealthiest and most populous city. The sun was directly overhead. I could hear the clamor of cars, street vendors, and musicians from the fifth floor.

It was my first in-person meeting with my new boss, Conectas’s director of programs, who would supervise the research I had been hired to do. My instructions were clear: as a consultant for a pilot project in the area of business and human rights, I was to research, over six months, the human rights criteria applicable to financing from the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES).

The final research product was published eighteen months later, in August 2014. What had been envisioned as a short-term assignment had become something much bigger. During my research, I examined the role and responsibility of funders in protecting the environment and human rights. I adopted a dual perspective: that of an academic and that of a financial professional with an eye toward ensuring that the financial sector’s policies and practices incorporate human rights and environmental justice standards. The hope was that by using the financial sector as an example, we could induce companies in other sectors to adopt these same standards, which is the goal of Conectas’s Business and Human Rights Project.

Today, almost four years after leaving the private financial sector, where I helped create financial projects for qualified

institutional investors and analyzed international banking regulations, it is not an exaggeration to say that my life has changed radically. Originally, when I left the field to pursue a master's degree, my plan was to return to corporate law—but this plan changed abruptly. Today, as a human rights lawyer at Conectas, I continue to focus on the financial sector, but from a different perspective. Instead of thinking about how to help financial institutions structure their products and services to provide higher returns to shareholders, I focus on how to ensure that these products and services can become vehicles for a more just, egalitarian, and sustainable society that respects human rights. I have also begun to pay attention to public funders and development banks, which, due to their unique nature, call for higher levels of transparency, consultations with affected parties, social accountability, allocations of responsibilities, and mechanisms for the prevention and mitigation of environmental damages and human rights violations.

In this chapter, I present some of the knowledge and experiences that I have gained since accepting the challenge of trying to incorporate environmental justice and human rights as key elements of development financing. Discussions of the technical and descriptive dimensions of my research are complemented by personal reflections, since there are many questions that still lack conclusive answers.

Specifically, the chapter explores the BNDES's financing of the Belo Monte Dam. The BNDES is the world's third-largest development bank (in terms of total assets) and is often the main sponsor of projects that have the potential to either significantly reduce or aggravate environmental injustices. Unfortunately, in practice, many of the projects and programs financed by the bank have deepened patterns of social exclusion and have limited citizens' access to meaningful participation vis-à-vis the entities charged with creating environmental policies and norms. The Belo Monte Dam—which, when finished, will be the world's third-largest hydroelectric dam—is but one example of a BNDES-financed project that has had disastrous socioenvironmental and human rights impacts. As the Belo Monte case shows, the BNDES has faltered in its search for truly effective long-term solutions that guarantee an egalitarian and universal usufruct of environmental heritage

for all, especially for historically marginalized minorities who are underrepresented within democratic institutions.

This chapter responds to the following question: How does the BNDES perceive environmental justice, and what institutional, legal, and social tools exist (or could be created) to obligate the bank to effectively internalize this issue? It is important to point out that the Belo Monte case is not exhaustive of the development financing world and its relationship with environmental justice. Other financing institutions—whether public or private, focused or not on development—exhibit distinct patterns that should be studied in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of the problem. Nonetheless, this chapter, by turning our gaze toward one of the world’s main development banks operating within the context of an emerging and influential economy, helps shed light on the main challenges and opportunities that exist for those who work on this issue from a global South perspective.

The Brazilian Development Bank: A Brief Overview

The BNDES was created in 1952 to analyze complex projects and to serve as the Brazilian government’s implementing arm for policies considered fundamental for the country’s path toward industrialization. The bank would act as the creator and implementer of Brazil’s national economic development policy. Its role as a source of funding for projects requiring long-term financing was essential, since, from the 1950s forward, Brazil’s private financial sector began to operate largely with short-term, low-risk loans, which were insufficient for sustaining a growing economy. Economic experts agree that the creation of the BNDES marked a decisive moment in the shaping of Brazilian capitalism, whether the bank is analyzed for its provision of resources for long-term, high-risk financing or for its role in the formation of a modern bureaucracy able to undertake studies and roll out new instruments for the promotion of economic development (Conectas 2014).

Throughout its existence, the BNDES has assumed a variety of roles, depending on the federal government’s policy at the moment. Understanding these roles is essential for being able to propose changes to the way the bank evaluates its investments under the lens of environmental justice and human rights.

The BNDES supports companies and ventures through direct financing (loans to a specific borrower), indirect financing (loans through an intermediary bank), consulting services for more complex operations, and corporate holdings in the capital market (see table 1).

TABLE I
The BNDES: Basic information

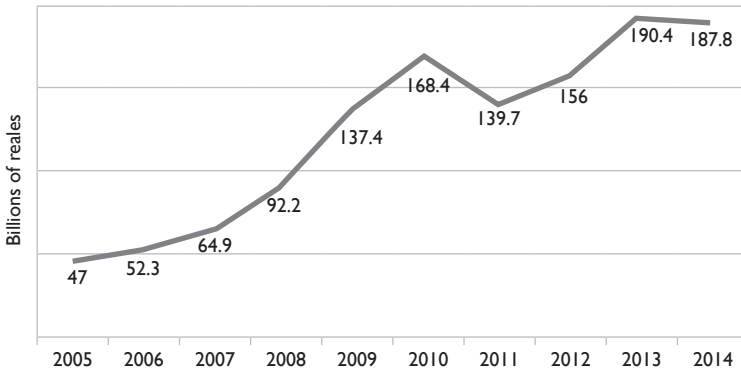
Founded: 1952
Structure: State development bank (associated with the Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade)
Control: Federal government (sole shareholder)
Disbursements (2014): R\$187.8 billion
Net profits (2014): R\$8.6 billion
Basel Index* (2014): 15.4%
Main affiliates and subsidiaries: BNDES Participações (BNDESPAR), which focuses on capital markets; the Special Agency for Industrial Financing, which promotes the production and commercialization of machines and equipment; and BNDES PLC, which supports the internationalization of Brazilian companies and is located in London. The BNDES has representative offices in Montevideo and Johannesburg.
Areas of operation: Urban, social, energy, and logistics infrastructure; industry; small and medium enterprises; agriculture; innovation; microcredit; climate change management; venture capital; private equity; exports and imports
Main activities: Direct financing; indirect financing (through intermediary financial agents, such as commercial banks, including import-export); financing through the Investment Guarantee Fund; capital market operations through the subsidiary BNDESPAR; advising on the structuring of projects and corporate operations; advising on the formulation of public policies; knowledge production
Number of staff: About 2,000

* The Basel Index measures an institution's core equity capital compared with its total risk-weighted assets. It is a financial soundness indicator composed of various "levels" of capital, according to their degree of liquidity and reliability. In Brazil, the minimum required index is 11% (in other words, for every 100 reals in loans, the bank should have 11 reals of equity capital).

SOURCE: Prepared by the author using data from BNDES's website and annual reports

The BNDES operates in a range of sectors, including oil and gas, agriculture, communications technology, mining, pulp and paper, petrochemistry, biofuel, and automotive. However, infrastructure has undoubtedly been the sector that has attracted the most funding from the bank since 2000. Between 2010 and 2014 alone, more than R\$292 billion was dedicated to airports, ports, highways, hydroelectric plants, thermo-power plants, wind farms, and waterways, among other works, the majority of which

FIGURE I
BNDES's disbursements (2005–2014)



SOURCE: Annual reports of the BNDES

were carried out as part of the government's ambitious Growth Acceleration Program, launched by former president Lula in 2007 and continued by his successor, Dilma Rousseff. This program aims to foster investment in structural sectors, including social, urban, logistics, and energy infrastructure.

The Growth Acceleration Program and the unfavorable international economic climate following the 2008 financial crisis—when the BNDES elevated its loan portfolio as investors withdrew their investments in light of an uncertain environment—are the main causes of the BNDES's considerable increase in disbursements over the past decade.

Traditionally, the BNDES funds its activities through the Worker Assistance Fund, a fund that provides resources for programs that strengthen workers' safety net, such as unemployment insurance. In accordance with the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, 40% of the fund's annual revenues are transferred to the bank. Nonetheless, since intensifying its anticyclical action in 2008 (in other words, increasing its investments in response to a credit supply shock in the private financial sector), the bank has substantially increased its volume of disbursements and, according to the prudential regulation of the Central Bank of Brazil, begun to require more resources to ensure its operations (see figure 1). Since that year, the Treasury began to cover the capital deficit that the Worker Assistance Fund could not supply. Between 2009 and 2015, R\$527 billion was injected into the BNDES. These transfers

were done through the executive branch with approval of the legislature.

The public origin of the BNDES's resources is arguably the strongest "hook" for raising public awareness of the bank's operations. Importantly, this characteristic is frequently raised in discussions on the violations of the rights of populations directly affected by BNDES-financed projects.

BNDES's Financing and Its Impacts on Environmental Justice and Human Rights

Banks possess a singular capacity for risk management. However, they are particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in the economic, political, institutional, and social arenas. To ensure that they can fulfill their commitments to their creditors, banks must develop sophisticated models and risk management systems for the risks to which they are exposed, which include market risks (price fluctuations), liquidity (insufficient cash resources to comply with short-term commitments), and operational risks (flaws in their processes, routines, and systems).

In particular, operational risks encompass legal risks and—most relevant for this case—environmental risks. The Central Bank of Brazil defines an environmental risk as "the possibility of losses arising from socioenvironmental damage" (art. 4 of Resolution 4327 of 2014 of the National Monetary Council). Therefore, banks—especially those that finance activities that are intensively contaminating or that have the potential to cause socioenvironmental impacts—must internalize a range of tools in their processes of selection, analysis, approval, and monitoring of projects in order to evaluate the potential risks that their loans may have for the environment and for populations that stand to be affected.

The majority of development financing institutions—including national development banks, multilateral development banks, and export credit agencies—have rules, procedures, and management tools aimed at preventing, mitigating, and eliminating negative impacts and, in some cases, compensating individuals and groups affected by development projects and policies, especially those that prioritize economic growth (Conectas 2014).

For example, the BNDES has mechanisms in place for assessing socioenvironmental impacts prior to a project's commencement

and for mitigating such impacts when they occur. Although the bank's internalization of environmental criteria dates back to the 1970s, it was not until 2010 that it developed a policy requiring a social and environmental analysis to be conducted for potential projects. This policy was created as part of the bank's acceptance of a US\$1.3 billion Sustainable Environmental Management Development Policy Loan from the World Bank.

The BNDES's Social and Environmental Responsibility Policy seeks to ensure that the bank's actions promote sustainability. According to the policy, social and environmental responsibility means "to attach importance to and ensure the integration of social and environmental dimensions in its strategy, policies, practices and procedures throughout all its efforts and relationships with its wide array of audiences." In the operational realm, these principles are embodied by procedures for identifying and addressing the social and environmental aspects of BNDES-sponsored projects throughout the various phases of the funding process. One such procedure is the "socioenvironmental analysis of projects," which covers the framework phase; the analysis, approval, and contracting phase; and the project monitoring phase (Conectas 2014).

Despite this policy and other internal mechanisms for evaluating and measuring socioenvironmental impacts, projects financed both directly and indirectly by the BNDES have had harsh socio-environmental and human rights effects, as revealed by research conducted by nongovernmental organizations and by the Public Prosecutor's Office.

Examples of human rights violations include degrading working conditions at the Santo Antônio and Jirau hydroelectric dams along on the Madeira River, located in Rondônia (Plataforma Dhesca 2011); the lack of free, prior, and informed consultation for indigenous communities affected by the construction of the Belo Monte Dam (Moraes 2012); and the purchase of cattle from ranches in the Brazilian Cerrado accused of using slave labor (Repórter Brasil 2011).

The Aim of the Research

We did not want my research to follow the traditional format and methodology used by human rights organizations—that is,

detailed research on one or more cases of human rights violations at the hands of the government or a company, or research that requires extensive fieldwork, data collection methods (such as interviews with victims and other key stakeholders), and sometimes even lab tests and on-site verification by specialists (geologists, chemists, doctors, and so on). This type of report, which generally aims to create an air of undeniability around a set of human rights abuses, is based on the compilation of evidence obtained through primary sources.

For the project that I had been hired to research, human rights violations related to BNDES's financing were not the main object of focus. Instead, we wished to analyze the flaws in the legal and institutional framework that enabled such violations to occur. We were already familiar with valuable studies, based on cases and evidence, showing how the bank's resources were being used to commit human rights violations and to finance ecologically unsustainable projects. These findings, which we collected through a mapping exercise and an analysis of secondary sources, would serve as a point of departure for my research.

Nonetheless, one case required a deeper look. With regard to BNDES-financed projects that have had massive socioenvironmental impacts, without a doubt the most emblematic case—due to its size, complexity, and scale of violations—is the Belo Monte Dam. This dam, which I had the opportunity to visit in December 2013, serves as the centerpiece of this chapter.

My Visit to Altamira and Belo Monte: Evidence of Asymmetric Development Financed by the Brazilian Development Bank

After a seven-and-a-half-hour flight, I arrived to Altamira, the biggest city near the Belo Monte Dam. From the plane, I had been able to see part of the dam, which had been easy to identify due to the massive clearing in the middle of the rainforest. My visit had emerged as a last-minute opportunity, and I planned to stay for three days. Technically, it was not a "field visit" but an opportunity to meet local stakeholders and witness up close a project that I had read so much about. Of course, it was also an opportunity to collect information that could lend greater consistency to the recommendations that I would develop for BNDES and other entities.

It was my first time in the heart of the Amazon, and the muggy air stuck to my skin. During the flight, gazing at the immense, dense, mysterious, and magnificent rainforest from high above, I had thought about how platitudes reproduce a somewhat schizophrenic image of the Amazon. On the one hand, we all know that the Amazon is a rare and fragile treasure—one of the world’s largest reservoirs of potable water and biodiversity—and that it requires preservation. On the other, this conservationist vision frequently gives way to utilitarian considerations regarding the exploitation of resources and the desire to sustain a certain way of living that we are loathe to abandon. In this way, it is not uncommon for people to adopt a paternalistic attitude toward the Amazon—one that decides what is “good” for the territory and the people who inhabit it.

Roberto, a taxi driver whom local organizations had recommended to me, was waiting for me at the airport. In reality, he was not a taxi driver by profession but rather someone who earned extra cash by providing transportation to passengers from the airport to the city and between the Belo Monte work site and indigenous communities. Given that so many outsiders had recently been arriving to the region, I had been warned that some of the locals—including those who could benefit from my work—might not receive me with open arms. The communities had become tired of being an object of study while seeing few changes in practice. Fortunately, in the following days, I spoke with extremely receptive and friendly individuals—though their signs of physical and emotional exhaustion were visible.

We went straight to the hotel, which was considered luxurious by local standards, for it had air conditioning, decent breakfasts, and hot water. Since the dam’s construction had begun, hotels and other amenities had doubled or tripled in price, and the cost of groceries and personal hygiene products had risen considerably. I later discovered that almost all of the hotel’s guests worked for the Consorcio Constructor de Belo Monte or Norte Energia.

From the hotel, I went to the office of Movimento Xingu Vivo para Sempre in Altamira, where I met with Antonia Melo, a feminist leader and icon of the resistance movement against the destruction of the Amazon. Antonia is a passionate human rights activist who mobilizes families to demand that the state provide

them with schools, electricity, and paved roads, among other basic rights. While there, I also met with a high school student and a grade school teacher, who were also part of the resistance movement against Belo Monte. Movimento Xingu Vivo para Sempre (also known as Xingu Vivo) is a collective of organizations and social and environmental movements in Altamira and the area surrounding Belo Monte. Its members include groups working on behalf of riverside populations, fishing communities, workers, indigenous groups, residents of Altamira, communities affected by dams, women, and religious groups. Xingu Vivo's office is located in a simple and discrete building. Taped on its front door is a piece of paper with the movement's logo. The air-conditioned office is decorated with plants and has a stand featuring indigenous products, which the movement sells for extra revenue. Internet access is slow.

One of the biggest concerns of Antonia and her colleagues was the resettlement of families living in the areas that would soon be flooded. According to the local census, approximately 5,000 families would need to be relocated. Norte Energia, the company responsible for the construction, was offering these families three options, all of which had their downsides. The first option involved the purchase of the family's property for a very low price compared to current real estate prices (which meant that purchasing a house elsewhere in Altamira would be prohibitively expensive). The second option consisted of moving the family to a 500-home residential complex being constructed by the company. People felt that these houses were very small, and they did not like their location in a "high" part of the city that was hard to reach and that lacked public services (such as transportation and security). These homes also had structural flaws and were not constructed according to the sizes of the families. The last option involved up to R\$900 in rental payments that the company would cover for a given period of time.

Another source of concern was public security. With the disorderly arrival of masses of people in search of the wealth promised by the project, the city began to suffer a wave of violence, along with a substantial increase in drug use (see table 2).

Further, Antonia and her colleagues explained that Belo Monte workers were being forced to work long hours in degrading