

Throughout the Xingu river basin, Antonia Melo da Silva is seen as a tireless warrior and beacon of hope. The Belo Monte Dam took her home, her livelihood, and her happiness. To this day, she still remembers the day the bulldozers arrived in her community. The fear that took root inside her and all her loved ones was incomparable, but one they soon learned to live with. Unwilling to leave anyone behind, Silva made sure everyone had a place to go before she packed up her family and said her final goodbyes to the land of her ancestors. She left, but she did not remain silent in the face of such injustice.

The dam brings death to the flora, the fauna, countless indigenous and traditional cultures that live in the Xingu basin. Our people face increased violence, unemployment and misery because the government and a group of investors want to exploit our land and rivers for profit. I dedicated my life to campaigning against this project, and though it has gone ahead, I will keep on fighting against what Belo Monte represents: a destructive, unsustainable and unfeasible development model. (Silva, 2017)

Silva created “Movimiento Xingu Vivo Para Sempre” over twenty years ago. Recently,

of Mines and Energy, Brazil will aim to increase hydropower capacity by 27 GW by 2024 (Minas e Energia, 2017). With the Belo Monte Dam, this will not be a challenge.

Today, the controversial hydroelectric challenge Brazil is facing regards the Belo Monte Dam that is currently under construction in the Xingu River Basin. On February 17th 2016, the Belo Monte Dam tested its first turbine (Southgate, 2016). With a planned finish date in 2019 and an installed capacity of 11,233 MW, the Belo Monte Dam is projected to not only catalyze economic growth, but to also expand access to electricity into isolated regions (Southgate, 2016). However, a host of economic, political, social, and environmental concerns associated with the construction of the dam have gained prominence.

With the future of Amazonia and all of the actors involved at risk with the continuing construction of the Belo Monte Dam, Brazil must try and find a harmonized balance between the three sustainability pillars: economic/political, social, and environmental. The dilemma is as follows:

1. Is the compromisation of one of the sustainability pillars inevitable in the construction and eventual generation of the Belo Monte Dam?
2. If so, do any alternatives to hydropower exist?

In order to contextualize these questions, the political, economic, and social environment of the Belo Monte Dam project must be examined. As an important stakeholder, “Movimiento Xingu Vivo Para Sempre” is uniquely situated to focus attention and resources into the best approach to addressing this energy challenge.

The timeline of the Belo Monte Dam has shifted the landscape of this contentious project for over five decades. Plans to dam the Xingu River date back to Brazil’s military dictatorship in the 1970s. As democracy was being restored to the nation in the 1980s, Brazil's state energy company, Eletrobrás, announced an ambitious plan to build six large dams on the Xingu River. The dam project was predicted to cause massive flooding of indigenous lands. As a result, the World Bank suspended funding for the project, crediting protest efforts by indigenous people.

In 2003, the Brazilian government unveiled a revamped version of Belo Monte and Brazil’s president at the time, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, urged his ministers to approve it. The project was authorized by a legislative decree, but lacked prior consultation with indigenous groups. Subsequently, indigenous groups fought back.

In 2008, indigenous activism forced the government to write and sign a resolution that would not only reduce the number of dams, but also promise no future upriver dam projects.

tribes that inhabit the Xingu River Basin consisting of over 25,000 indigenous peoples (Santos, 2011). Xinguanos, natives of the Xingu River Basin, worship the river as the “house of God.” Furthermore, waters from the river are used in ceremonial and symbolic rituals (Santos, 2011). When talking about the cultural impacts of the Belo Monte project, special attention must be

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