The State Council Executive Meeting Discusses and Passes the "Three Gorges Post-Project Plan"

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Translated by Probe International

See the original version in Chinese:  

On May 18, 2011, Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, held a State Council executive meeting that discussed and passed the "Three Gorges Post-Project Plan" and "Water Pollution Control Plan for the Middle and Lower Reaches of the Yangtze River."

The meeting pointed out that, with the Central Government's and State Council’s strong leadership, the strong support of the people of China and 17 years of hard work, the initial stage of the Three Gorges project design and construction has been completed within schedule and that its multi-purpose benefits — including flood control, hydropower, shipping, and water resources — are now being realized. However, at the same time as tremendous benefits are being realized, problems have also emerged, with resettlement, environmental protection, and geological hazard prevention, and so on, and need to be urgently addressed. For example, problems have also emerged with the dam project’s impact on shipping, irrigation, and water supply in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze.

Some of these problems were foreseen during the project's evaluation and design, and were slated for correction after the project was completed. Some of these problems were identified during the project’s construction but, due to time constraints, proved too difficult to remedy effectively at the time. Some of these problems are the result of new issues due to ongoing economic and social development.

It is meaningful and important to start the Three Gorges post-project work now, to ensure the Three Gorges Project continues to operate safely in the long term, to provide multi-purpose benefits, to increase the project’s contribution to national economic and social development, and to increase the benefits to the people in China.

The meeting emphasized that the Three Gorges post-project work must insist on the principles of putting people first, and to paying more attention to citizens’ lives, environmental protection, and sustainable development. Three Gorges post-project work must also take all factors into account in the comprehensive planning process, emphasizing key elements, such as state support and multiple sources of finance, by
prioritizing issues according to their importance and urgency, and by implementing the post-project plan on a step-by-step basis. Through improved policies and the provision of more significant financial support, a new and stable reservoir area will achieve economically, socially and environmentally harmonious development.

The goals of the "Three Gorges Post-Project Plan" are:

- By 2020, the living standard of the resettled population should equal the average standard of living in Hubei Province and Chongqing Municipality;
- Establish a social security system for all resettled residents in urban and rural areas;
- Make significant improvements in the economic structure and increased competitiveness of the reservoir area;
- Improve transportation, water resource conservancy, and urban infrastructure development;
- Provide basic social and public services in the resettlement areas;
- Control environmental degradation;
- Provide long-term geological hazard protection and management;
- Develop disaster prevention and damage reduction systems.

To achieve these goals:

1. Encourage economic and social development in the reservoir area; provide the resettled population with stability and prosperity, and improved job opportunities. The government will supplement the retirement insurance and medical insurance premiums of the population relocated in urban areas, and in farming villages located in ecological buffer zones;

2. Improve environmental restoration and conservation for the reservoir water body, the riparian zone, the ecological buffer zone, and major tributaries feeding the reservoir. Provide system-wide pollution control, increase ecosystem resiliency and capacity, and reduce the influx of pollution into the reservoir area. Develop an environmental protection system;

3. Improve reservoir area geological hazard prevention, develop a monitoring and alarm system, and an emergency response system. For those facing the threat of geological hazards: relocate rural villagers, provide engineering solutions to reduce the risk in newly built towns, high density areas and other areas that face significant potential damage from geological hazards. Control future land-use urban developments in high-risk areas;
4. Mitigate the negative impacts of the dam on the middle reaches and downstream areas of the Yangtze. Implement engineering solutions, river stabilization, improve levees, improve navigation and water intake functions, ecosystem restoration, improve environmental habitat, protect biodiversity, improve monitoring and research efforts, and optimize reservoir control;

5. Improve the Three Gorges Dam project comprehensive management capability: develop a comprehensive monitoring system, information delivery platform and decision-making system, and provide a long-term project implementation management system;

6. Focus on turning flood water into a resource, optimize reservoir control, and improve water supply benefits. Expand the overall benefits of the Three Gorges project’s flood control, hydro-electric, navigation, ecological, and water resource functions. Improve the country’s strategic protection of water safety and electricity supply grid operation.

The meeting requests that local governments and agencies reinforce leadership and collaboration, improve policy implementation, and carefully arrange implementation.

The "Water Pollution Control Plan for the Middle and Lower Reaches of the Yangtze River" will now include five control areas, namely the main channel of the Yangtze; the mouth of Yangtze River; the middle and lower reaches of the Han River; Dongting Lake; and Poyang Lake. It covers 408 counties in eight provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government, with a 638,000 km² watershed area. The middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River is one of China’s highest population density areas, with the strongest economy, and with one of the highest levels of stress on the ecosystem. Due to rapid economic and social development, water pollution of the valley is increasingly worsening and threatening water supply sources and the aquatic ecosystem.

By focusing on optimizing the economic structure and manufacturing assets, using a combination of engineering, technology, and ecological methods, we can enhance environmental protection, improve overall river and estuary water pollution control and environmental monitoring standards, protect the safety of the potable water sources and water quality, solve major environmental problems in the valley, as well as encourage social and economic growth.

This meeting asks that project management be improved, project quality be assured, and that evaluations and assessments be provided to ensure that the "Water Pollution Control Plan for the Middle and Lower Reaches of the Yangtze River" is successfully implemented.