

## Social Issues, Consultation and People's Participation with respect to the Lower Sesan 2 Dam

### CDA Research Project

#### Main Points

- The impacted communities are still relatively limited in their capacity to get their voice heard and to influence the project.
- More efforts need to be directed towards building community capacity and solidarity between affected villages, and clarifying key demands and needs.
- People in affected villages in Sesan district have not received adequate information, opportunity for consultation, discussion and participation in the planning of the Sesan 2 dam project.
- The consultation and information has not only been inadequate in terms of amount of consultation opportunities and information provided, but also in terms of the ways consultation has occurred.
- The majority of people in the affected villages interviewed during the research are not in favour of the dam project going ahead and they do not want to move, however as the dam project has been approved by the government they believe they have little option but to comply.
- Communities have been only consulted regarding resettlement and compensation. However, even here the information provided is not comprehensive and adequate on which to make decisions.
- It should be clear that communities cannot accept the resettlement and compensation until they have full information concerning the compensation provided, the resettlement sites, the time frame for resettlement, and how short and long term livelihood and social impacts will be mitigated.

#### Recommendations for NGO support

##### Capacity to Influence

- The ability of the affected communities in Sesan district to influence the project and get their voice heard is still relatively limited. The NGOs working on the Sesan need to provide coordinated support to the communities to strengthen their capacity to influence.
  - NGOs can help to strengthen the understanding of community members about the dam and the possible impacts. This should particularly be directed at community members who have been less involved in meetings and discussions around the dam.

- NGOs should help the communities to organize and network (links and communication) between communities so that each affected community, and all of the communities together have clear goals as to what they want to achieve. So they can discuss what their key demands are, even for villages which may not be relocated.
- NGOs should support affected communities to be able to meet on a regular basis involving more community members – not just key representatives
- Work also needs to be conducted with the local authorities so they also understand the needs and rights of the people and what should be expected in terms of consultation and participation of people in decisions around large projects such as dams
- Provide or source/find institutions that can provide legal advice to communities. Support communities to seek independent advice.
- Support capacity of authorities and key representatives to be able to pass on information to their communities, to document and to retain records of meetings, decisions etc.

### **Information and Consultation**

- The affected communities in Sesan district currently have incomplete information regarding the dam construction, the full range of impacts on the environment, the resettlement and compensation package being offered, and the longer-term social and economic impacts to their lives and livelihoods. NGOs working on Sesan should provide coordinated support to communities in terms of:
  - Lobbying government to release information about the dam construction and time line and sharing this information with the community when it is available.
  - Providing clear, easily understood information about the short-term impacts during dam construction and the longer-term impacts in terms of fisheries, wildlife and surrounding environment. The information should be sourced from recent research studies in addition to the EIA report of 2009. Pictures, videos and maps could be used so people can visualize these impacts.
  - In addition to discussions about what compensation will be received, NGOs should discuss with the communities the possible short-term and long-term impacts to their livelihoods to allow for a better understanding of impacts and to allow plans to be developed to mitigate these impacts
- NGOs should play a role to lobby the Resettlement Committee, local government, national government and the company to meet the communities on a regular basis to update on project progress and to consult with the communities on decisions that will affect them. In addition NGOs should support communities to lobby on the following (and should also follow these recommendations themselves):

- Communities have requested that meetings should happen in their villages and at times of day as defined by villagers that will allow as many villagers to attend as possible. If meetings have to be held out of the village then the villagers should have travel and accommodation costs covered.
- Communities have requested that meetings are documented, (perhaps by Khmer language notes or by tape recorder or video) so that information can be remembered correctly, easily passed on to other community members, and maintained for future reference.
- Communities have requested that they receive prior notice of meetings and the objective of the meetings so that they can assemble villagers and consider the issue prior to the meeting taking place.
- Communities have requested that at any meeting they are not simply asked to raise hands to agree or disagree, but are given time to consider what is being proposed, to be able to ask further questions and to be able to respond after full consultation with the community.
- Communities have requested that at any meeting there should not be a presence of military, police or body-guards which could be perceived as threatening by villagers.
- Communities have requested that any documentation provided should be in languages and formats that are understandable to them.

## **Resettlement and Compensation**

- The affected communities in Sesan district have not yet agreed to the resettlement and compensation being offered by the government as they have not received full information on which to base a decision. NGOs can support the communities in the following ways:
  - Communities do not have a clear understanding about who is responsible for the resettlement and what is the role of the provincial Resettlement Committee. NGOs can help to find out information on the role of the committee, who they are and how villagers can interact with them.
  - Villagers have not yet received a clear, written compensation policy requiring exactly what will be covered and allowing an opportunity for them to review and give feedback. The communities and NGOs need to lobby for the provision of a full policy to be provided to the villagers so they can discuss in detail and come back with feedback to the Resettlement Committee. The policy should include pictures of village layout, infrastructure, housing etc.
  - Meetings should be arranged with the Resettlement Committee or other relevant stakeholders to discuss people's feedback on the proposed policy and their overall concerns. It is important that the people get their concerns heard and responded to.

- Communities and NGOs need to lobby for the provision of a clear timeframe for resettlement so that communities can plan and prepare. Villagers should be facilitated to visit the resettlement sites before relocation, and should also be informed clearly about what infrastructure will be in place when they move.
- Communities and NGOs need to lobby for information to be provided to the communities about who will be responsible to solve problems if and when they relocate and who grievances can be filed to.
- Villages which do not yet have clear information on their status as to whether they will need to move for the dam or not, need to have clear information on the impact to their village and whether they will be required to move.
- Potential impacts (short and long term) of the resettlement need to be discussed with the people so that they can plan for their livelihoods. This should include assessments of social and economic risks (gender and age disaggregated), monitoring and mitigation plans and who will be responsible to do the monitoring and mitigate the impacts.
- The final agreement of villagers to accept the offered resettlement and compensation should be based on full information and understanding, and should be formal and written witnessed by a neutral party.