



THE NGO FORUM ON CAMBODIA

MEDIA RELEASE

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Launch of New Report on Current Livelihoods of Communities in Lower Sesan and Srepok areas, and likely effect of proposed Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Dam

Today the NGO Forum on Cambodia launched its newest research, into the current livelihoods of the communities resident in the Lower Sesan and Srepok areas, and the likely effects that the proposed Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Dam will have on those communities.

The new Report is titled ***Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Dam: Current Livelihoods of Local Communities. A Baseline Study***. It was launched to a large gathering of key stakeholders today in Phnom Penh.

The Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Dam Development Project is considered by the Royal Government of Cambodia as a high priority in Cambodia's development.

However, the report finds that the environmental impact assessments carried out for the project have failed to meet even minimum standards for public participation and information. None of the nine communities located upstream and downstream of the dam have been provided with adequate information about the Dam's potential impacts.

"It is extremely important that proper consultation takes place, and full information is provided to these communities", said Mr Chhith Sam Ath, Executive Director, NGO Forum.

"While we recognize the importance of new hydropower developments, they must not occur at the expense of peoples' livelihoods", he said.

The key objective of the report is to explore the current livelihoods and traditions of people – mostly from indigenous origin- living alongside the Sesan and Srepok Rivers. The report also looks at how these people will be affected by the new Dam, which was approved by the Royal Government of Cambodia in November 2012. It provides a baseline study against which the lives of residents can be compared as the dam progresses.

Most residents of these communities think that the dam will affect the livelihoods, occupations, farm land, crops, properties, access to education, ability to observe religious traditions, village infrastructure and natural resources upon which they depend for income support. These natural resources include forest products, animals, fisheries and the biodiversity of the area.

Thus, residents do not want the project to be constructed in their area, but if it does go ahead, they request that the government take into account the impacts the project will have on their livelihoods, and the need for appropriate support for relocation and compensation where required.

Although there has been consultation with a small number of people on the construction impacts, most villagers are unaware of proposed construction timeframes and processes, possible compensation, and need and timing for resettlement.

Most residents have predicted negative impacts on their lives after resettlement, as in the proposed new area there are no houses, crops, occupations for income generation, no possibilities for fishing, and more distant water sources.

Three key areas are of concern: farm land and plantation land; housing and basic infrastructure (roads, schools, pagodas, health centres) and other important needs such as water sources, fruit trees, livestock availability and the general amenities of their existing living conditions.

The study focuses on five main areas of resources for daily livelihoods: human resources, physical infrastructure, financial resources, social capital, and natural resources.

Currently, general education levels are limited, with a high dropout rate. Most children leave school before completing primary education.

Lack of health services are a serious problem, with considerable distances to facilities.

There is no documentation of official land registration that certifies land occupation in the study areas, as they are not areas yet adjudicated. Only some 12% have applied for land use receipt of certification, as land in the area was transferred from one generation to another without official papers.

Most people work in agriculture and their livelihoods rely completely on this sector. Further, they have other secondary occupations, such as fishing, collecting non-timber forestry products, and other work such as household animal husbandry.

The average income per person in this study is only 51% of the 100% of per capita income according to the Cambodian standard of the National Institute of Statistics.

Close social relations are an important part of the livelihoods of these communities, and it will be vital to ensure that any relocation can facilitate the continuation of this close community life.

The residents of these communities do not wish this dam to be constructed, as it will have great impacts on their livelihoods. However, if the government considers that building the dam is a development that provides great benefits for Cambodia, then heads of villages and residents request that full and proper consultation occur on all aspects of the dam's development, and that the government take full account of compensation needs in a fair, just and acceptable manner to ensure that residents' livelihoods will not face more difficulties than they do at present.

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Media Contact: Mr Chhith Sam Ath, Executive Director, NGO Forum 012 928 585