



The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Forum  
on Water and Food  
Tshwane, South Africa  
November 14 – 17, 2011



Co-hosted by:



---

## **Study of pathways of agenda setting in planning and public consultation in the Lower Sesan 2 project: Inclusion of local livelihood and poverty issues**

**SUON SENG<sup>1</sup>, SEANG PHYROM, CHAY KEARTHA, RICHARD FRIEND  
AND EDESEL SAJOR**

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Development Oriented Research in Agriculture and Livelihood Systems  
[suonseng@online.com.kh](mailto:suonseng@online.com.kh)

**Session: Basin (Mekong); TWG (research to policy)**

### **Key Message**

Water for people's livelihoods including for food production, fisheries, agriculture and etc.) is always considered an important factor to be addressed in the design of any storage structure. However, in all stages of construction of hydropower projects (i.e., planning, pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, detailed design, construction and operation), determination of use/s of water is commonly under the major influence or control of the investors' groups. The participation of stakeholders especially of affected communities has been very limited if not ignored outright.

## **Summary**

How is it that a publicly known fact about the unusually high incidence of poverty in the local project area (that is, 40% as against the national average of 26%) has not figured prominently at all as a focal subject in planning and subsequent public consultations on the project of the Lower Sesan 2 hydropower project (LS2) in Cambodia? This paper tries to address this question by examining how agenda setting in planning and public consultations associated with the project has actually been used as the main instrument by convenors in a manner that excludes issues of poverty and livelihoods of the

people in the project area even though these issues are an integral and essential element in dam and other infrastructure development planning. This exclusion in the inception and planning stage has also locked in the agenda for subsequent government-initiated public consultation with local people to focus on mitigation and compensation of projected environmental and direct socio-economic impacts of the dams in the most immediate vicinity. On the other hand, subsequent NGO-initiated public consultations have also limited their agenda to the impact of dams on the natural environment. Agenda setting, of course, has also defined the composition of these public consultation forums. Agenda setting in planning meetings and public consultations as an exclusion mechanism vis-à-vis local poverty and livelihood issues in LS2 would be examined through analysis of official communications and policy discourses of the government, through interviewees with local people at the project site, and through direct observations and document analyses of two public consultation meetings called by the NGO communities in Cambodia.