



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



Co-hosted by:



Better preparation for the changes of livelihoods of ethnic minorities: Case study of the Lower Sesan 2 hydropower dam in Cambodia

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Session: Livelihoods



VILLAGE REPRESENTATIVES JOIN IN THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ON THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THEIR LIVELIHOODS FROM THE LOWER SESAN 2 HYDROPOWER PROJECT. THE MEETING IS IN PREPARATION FOR HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT THEIR FUTURE LIVELIHOOD CHOICES (PHOTO BY KHEAN SOVANNARA)

Key Message

Any development project should not only aim at boosting profits. The dam operator should undertake a comprehensive preliminary study of the current livelihoods system of any ethnic minority groups who are the majority of the affected population. The study requires the active involvement of stakeholders, and the result can be the basis for intervention planning to ensure the knowledge and skills needed for effectively addressing the future livelihood activities of the affected ethnic peoples.

Summary

The Mekong basin is undergoing massive hydropower development with a series of projects planned or being completed that are affecting the livelihood of villagers especially ethnic peoples. In Cambodia, the planned Lower Sesan 2 (LS2) hydropower project will affect different ethnic groups who are geographically and culturally quite isolated from the mainstream Cambodian society. A majority of the ethnic population is currently dependent on traditional livelihoods comprising of mainly rotational farming, collecting non-timber forests products and capture fisheries. In the LS2's environmental assessment, sufficient detail is not provided on the current livelihood systems of these people. Furthermore, there are no plans outlined on how the company and/or the government will support the transition and lifeskills building for those affected especially before the resettlement operations begin. As part of this research study, discussions were held with these ethnic communities to get a better understanding of their perspectives and aspirations for the future. Some of their future choices for livelihoods are fish ponds, new agricultural practices including knowledge and skills in applying fertilizer, pest control, growing new varieties of rice, and raising livestock. All these options would require that communities are provided with suitable skills training beforehand. These needs are currently overlooked by both policy makers/planners and dam operators. This study will look into the effective measures to address the needs of the affected people and to encourage the dam operator towards taking more social responsibility for the impacts of the project.