

Introduction

On September 11th Oxfam Australia, in partnership with GreenID, held the first of a series of three regional workshops on gender justice in hydropower development in Hanoi. This workshop aimed at collecting and integrating feedback from Vietnamese stakeholders for Oxfam's "Gender Justice on Hydropower" manual.

More specifically the workshop focused on four main objectives:

- 1) Understanding the general context of gender and women's rights within Vietnam.
- 2) Documenting how gender is relevant to hydropower development.
- 3) Creating a space for key stakeholders to share their perspective on hydropower and discuss the draft gender impact assessment tool for hydropower.
- 4) Discussing how to take forward women's discussion on gender and hydropower and look for opportunities for linking with other initiatives.

Attendance at the workshop was high and diverse, with over 50 participants from several different sectors including academia, national and local government, electricity companies, local communities, civil society organizations and media. As Oxfam Australia intended to hear women's perspectives on the matter, we were pleased to see that the majority of the participants were women.

Background

The Mekong region is in midst of rapid change. Regional economic integration, increasing trade and investment, industrialisation and urbanisation, are among some of the key drivers contributing to the development of large-scale hydropower projects. These projects have several significant impacts on communities living up- and down-stream, ultimately resulting in these people bearing lower conditions of life. Although communities are negatively impacted as a whole, often women suffer most while men benefit from Hydropower.

In light of this concern, and drawing on our previous experience in the Mining Sector, Oxfam has produced a Gender Manual to assess how women and men utilize river resources and how hydropower project impact communities differently depending on gender. This manual is intended to be used by hydropower developers and National Governments to take informed decision on the management of rivers and safeguard communities living on the Mekong.

In order to ensure that this manual is inclusive and relevant to each country's context, Oxfam is collaborating with local partners to organize workshops where national stakeholders, from different sectors, meet and share their views on the manual's draft. In the case of Vietnam, Oxfam collaborated with GreenID. This organization was chosen as it has played a key role in hydropower issues in Vietnam over many years and has a strong gender expertise. Through its active engagement in hydropower, it has also developed robust networks with key players and decision-makers. These were the

stakeholders who participated in this workshop to provide feedback on the draft manual.

The workshop

The workshop was divided into three sessions, with the first one dedicated to establishing a common understanding of the issue among all participants through the analysis of questions such as “What does gender have to do with Hydropower?”, “How do dams impact women and men differently in Vietnam?”, but also “How is gender addressed by Vietnamese laws and practices?”

Through presentations and discussions, the participants addressed these questions by clarifying how the construction of hydropower dams has negative impacts on the environment and how this in return impacts communities. It was also made clear how, within these communities, women suffer the impact of hydropower more than men, and how they are more vulnerable to new social and physical environments when communities are relocated. It was confirmed that Vietnam has strong legislation on gender equity, but that there is still a gap between these broader laws and specific policies for gender justice in the context of hydropower projects.

During the second Session, participants were divided into groups, where they were invited to review the gender impact assessment tools for hydropower in the manual. The tools focused on:

- Data collection and gender surveys: identifying which are the “productive”, “household”, “community”, and

“educational” activities that are carried out by men and which ones by women.

- How environmental and social impact assessments are implemented in Vietnam and what is their legal status.
- What are the possible impacts of a dam in Vietnam on women, men and the community as a whole
- What are the practical and the strategic needs of women whose livelihoods depend on the river
- What are the political institutions involved in the projects on a national level and what is their function. And also: How are women involved in local formal and informal governing bodies.

The last session was dedicated to sharing the ideas originated by each group during the previous session through a gallery walk. Some of the key ideas shared were:

- Participants, the majority being women, saw men being victims of the situation rather than perpetrators of injustice and saw the government intervention as a way to address most of the issues.
- More support is needed for families to manage finance. This support should be included in the resettlement agreements
- Better arable land and better housing is needed in relocation areas. This solution should be provided by Hydropower Companies
- When it comes to schooling, families prefer investing in sons rather than daughters. Government should specifically support all costs incurred by girls (including transportation).
- The tools proposed in the manual were seen as

useful to limit corruption and increase accountability of government officials in the context of Hydropower infrastructure.

- Some of the tools' categories do not translate accurately in Vietnamese. This stressed the importance of good understanding of the tool and cultural context in the translation from English to Vietnamese.

(Please note that the feedback from each group was extensive, and that it often referred to a specific tool. For the sake of brevity, above, we have not attached the tables necessary to understand all the comments, but have listed some key points to provide a picture of the ideas that the groups presented.)

The Manual

The feedback from this workshop will be integrated with the feedback that will be collected during the Workshops in Cambodia and Laos. The opinions expressed and documented in these three workshops will be critical for finalizing the Gender Manual, which, once completed, will be available for download on Oxfam's website.

Resources

Oxfam Australia Mekong-related reports and materials, including links to publicly available resources and research discussed at the roundtable can be found at:
www.oxfam.org.au/mekong

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