

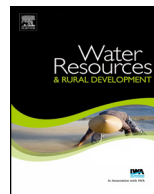


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Broadening stakeholder participation to improve outcomes for dam-forced resettlement in Vietnam



Jane Singer ^{a,*}, Pham Huu Ty ^b, Hoang Hai ^c

^a Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, Kyoto University, Kyoto 606-8501, Japan

^b Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry, Hue, Viet Nam

^c Department of International Cooperation, The University of Danang, Danang, Viet Nam

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ABSTRACT

Forced resettlement due to hydropower dam construction in Vietnam continues to result in poor outcomes, in part due to the poor productivity of replacement agricultural land, poor local governance, and constrained access by displaced farmers to forest land and fisheries. This paper critically examines three recent initiatives in Vietnam that promise to promote more stable livelihoods for displaced populations and to strengthen participation in development for residents as well as civil society. The first is a payment for environmental services (PES) scheme for hydroelectric revenue sharing to fund forest maintenance and monitoring by displaced households, while the second focus is an international financial institution (IFI)-initiated project that prioritizes gender empowerment and participation. The PES scheme promises a sustainable income stream for displaced households and has institutionalized legal and government backing, but it entails high transaction costs and a lengthy planning phase. The IFI project offers residents generous compensation and the rights embodied in IFI involuntary safeguards, but a lack of effective livelihood support and poor communication provide cautionary notes. A third, rights-based approach by Vietnamese civil society organizations (CSOs) involves advocacy to achieve effective reallocation of state-managed forest land to displaced villagers. The authors examine the potential for benefit-sharing mechanisms, IFIs, and CSOs, backed by new legislation and expanding space for civil society in Vietnam, to address the

* Corresponding author. Address: Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, Kyoto University, Yoshida-Honmachi, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8501, Japan.

E-mail addresses: singer.jane.6e@kyoto-u.ac.jp (J. Singer Douchamps), phamhuuty@huaf.edu.vn (H.T. Pham), hainv87@hotmail.com (H. Hoang).

problems posed by inadequate local governance. They conclude that these approaches show merit for nationwide replication, and there is a need for including these external stakeholders in local resettlement management bodies.

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1. Introduction

Vietnam increasingly relies on hydropower to help satisfy electricity demand estimated to expand by 10–12% per year from 2011 to 2015 [73]. Hydropower currently accounts for approximately 36% of electricity generation [61] and the volume will increase as a number of newly constructed or planned hydropower dams come on-line. According to a 2013 survey of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, there are currently 260 hydropower plants in operation with an installed capacity of 13,694 MW. Several hundred more hydropower dams are now planned or under construction, including 21 large dams to be completed by 2017 [39].

Dam construction in Vietnam has displaced approximately 240,000 people to date [63], with two major hydropower dams alone, Hoa Binh and Son La, displacing an estimated 58,000 and 92,000 residents, respectively [17]. An additional 60,000 people are expected to be dispossessed by 2017 [39]. Most of the displaced are ethnic minority agriculturalists highly dependent on access to forests and fisheries as well as upland fields for their livelihoods.

Vietnam's large hydropower dam projects have become especially contentious in recent years, largely due to greater media coverage and growing awareness of poor human and environmental impacts, including declines in river water quality, reduced flow during the dry season, and degraded fisheries, forests and biodiversity. The Vietnamese media has recently exposed a number of dam-related scandals and accidents, including cracked walls and water leakage due to shoddy construction (Song Tranh 2 dam), sudden releases of reservoir water during storms that inundate downstream areas and communities (Yali Falls dam, 2005; Avuong dam, 2009), and destructive tremors caused by water pressure in reservoirs situated over previously unidentified fault lines (Song Tranh 2 dam, 2012).

Even government officials are increasingly voicing concerns about the social and environmental costs of hydropower and suggesting more caution in pursuing further dam construction [59]. The central government has directed provincial people's committees to review current applications to eliminate inefficient projects or those with negative environmental or resettlement impacts. In Quang Nam province in central Vietnam, the provincial government cancelled 23 of 57 projects originally planned for the Vu Gia-Thu Bon river basin [60] and neighboring Kon Tum's provincial people's committee has cancelled plans for 21 of 69 installed or planned hydropower projects [24]. On October 30, 2013, Vu Huy Hoang, the Minister of Industry and Trade, announced that no new large dams will be built after 2015, although 400 small and mid-sized dams will be constructed [65]. Displacement implications of this decision are unclear: while smaller-scale dams may result in less overall displacement, the fact that most depend on private investment may imply weaker national regulatory oversight and fewer investor resettlement safeguards in place. This burgeoning private sector investment is contiguous with ongoing decentralization and privatization of the power sector in Vietnam, in line with central government aims to reform the sector, widely criticized for mismanagement and speculative investments.

Despite a national regulatory framework that mandates higher levels of financial compensation than before, land-for-land compensation and post-resettlement livelihood assistance, a 2010 survey by a national institute found that 82% of dam-displaced residents become worse off after resettlement than before [25]. Researchers on dam-forced displacement in Vietnam report several common obstacles that have thwarted efforts to improve resettlement outcomes, including local government provision of agricultural land of insufficient quality and quantity and a lack of access to forests and fisheries, which many farmers depend on for supplemental income and enhanced year-round food

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