

Authorities Listen to Communities Concern about Lower Sesan 2 Dam Impact

By Sesan-Srepok Sub-Basins Project Working Group



A construction site of the Lower Sesan 2 hydropower in Stung Treng, Cambodia. @Sesan-Srepok sub-basins project working group.

While communities living along the Sesan River in Cambodia concern about the impacts of an ongoing hydropower project in Stung Treng, Cambodian authorities and the developer said steps are being taken to minimise impacts of the dam.

The Cambodia's Lower Sesan 2 hydropower, invested by a joint venture, began its construction in 2014 and expected to be completed by 2019.

Cambodian officials have conducted community interviews in three provinces of Rattanakiri, Stung Treng and Mondolkiri, and found that major communities' concerns included the hydropower's potential effects on local livelihoods, especially those of fishermen. Villagers in Ratanakiri province of Cambodia cited decreasing fish catches, often of less than one kilogram (kg) a day, since dam construction commenced in 2014.

"Before, my husband could catch more than 10 kg of fishes per day. It was enough for consumption and we could sell the remaining for income," said Mrs. Ping Chamroeun, a villager

from Tumpuon Reung Thom village of Rattankiri province. “It falls to less than 1 kg today, which is just enough to feed the family.”

These concerns were assessed by the Cambodian working group of the Sesan-Srepok Sub-Basins Water Resources Management Project in late 2015.

Communities’ representatives reported that their livelihoods also had been affected by other hydropower development in the upstream and concerned that they would face the same problem when the Lower Sesan 2 dam is operated.

Deputy Governor of Stung Treng Duong Pov acknowledged the concerns and said authorities have been trying to minimize the impacts.

“We have a lot of lessons learnt from other development in the upstream. We will take those lessons and optimize the use of water in Cambodia,” he said during a joint visit organized by the Sesan-Srepok sub-basins project in August 2016.

Originating in the Central Highlands of Viet Nam, the Sesan River flows through Dak Lak, Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces of Viet Nam before entering Ratanakiri and Stung Treng provinces of Cambodia, where it merges with the Srepok River. Both river basins are among the largest transboundary tributaries to the Mekong River.

The Key Consultants Cambodia – a consulting firm conducting environmental impact assessment for the hydropower company – estimated direct and indirect losses caused by the Lower Sesan 2 dam at around US \$38 million, including household income losses and ecological impacts.

In an effort to mitigate the impact of the hydropower on fish stock, the company is constructing a fish seed production centre to breed local fish species and release them back to the river. A fishway is also being built.

Mr. Hun Sothy, Deputy Chief of Research and Flood Forecasting at the Department of Hydrology and River Works of Cambodia’s Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, said the hydropower plant would bring a range of benefits to sub-basin residents, including increased economic development in Cambodia, increased dry season river flow, and improved flood control.

“The positive impact of Sesan 2 is greater than the negative impact,” said Sothy. “The local and downstream impact is the cumulative impact of cascade dams in the Sesan-Srepok area, not only the [Sesan 2] dam alone.”

The Cambodia National Mekong Committee estimated that hydropower generation by the dam is expected to bring in revenues of more than US \$97 million annually.

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is working to promote sustainable development and management of water resources in the Lower Mekong Basin. Through five transboundary projects funded by the World Bank, under the MRC's Integrated Water Resources Management Project, the MRC supports the Mekong countries to enhance cross-border dialogue to achieve that goal

The Sesan-Srepok sub-basins project is one of those. It is being implemented by Cambodia and Viet Nam, which will improve water resources management at the sub-basin level through cooperation and dialogue between the two governments.

The project has identified common issues, information sharing needs, and coordination requirements between the two countries and is now moving towards the development of shared mechanisms to address transboundary management and coordination needs between the two countries.