

ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH FOR AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

A case of hydropower project in Ho Moong commune, Kon Tum province

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to share some of experiences from CIRUM point of view to approach an action research on the impacts of investments for socio-economic development on the ground.

The research involved affected people as local researchers of the community. CIRUM acts as a facilitator and consultant; CIRUM accompanies in the process for getting better understanding for solutions to meet crucial needs and concerns of the local people. The research findings are used as practical inputs for advocacy activities for the rights and benefits of the affected people.

CIRUM hopes that the followings practical experiences are helpful lessons learnt to discuss right based approach.

2. RESEARCH CONTEXT

The action research (AR) has conducted in Ho Moong commune, Sa Thay district, Kon Tum province, where 748 households per 4,000 people resettled in 2005-2006 by Pleikrong hydropower projects. They are 100% of Ja Rai and Ro Ngao ethnic minority people. The Pleikrong Hydropower Plant was built on the Po Co river and based upstream of the Se San river with a capacity of 110MW, affecting 1,300 households with 6,000 people from 4 districts: Sa Thay, Dac Ha, Dac To and Kon Tum city.

After more than 10 years' resettlement, affected people has become crisis. Local farmers have not enough land for cultivation, even infertile soil leading food insecurity. Land disputes have been lasting for many years that have not been resolved creating conflicts over land issues between villagers and economic companies. Rights to drinking water and irrigation are not secured, not enough for daily life, lasting drought that lead to threats for the community health; housing style is not appropriate for local culture and poor quality construction that has led many of families have to return to their ancestor land for living; while many of other families have to built themselves their small traditional houses for living which is based next to the new housing style. Lacking of land for cultivation meaning jobless for local farmers, and there is no choice, they have to work as labourers for the companies on their own customary land. Their belief is crisis due to lack of natural forests for traditional worship practice. All these have been creating social conflicts and insecurity in the community. The youth is not listened to the old for the values of the traditional culture in behavior among parent and children, the young involved in social evils (gambling, alcohol,...); and local authorities are also in stuck.

For reasons mentioned above, objectives of the research are:

- i. to equip local people to better knowledge of their basic rights such as rights to land for food security; rights to drinking water; rights to housing; and rights to practice their belief...
- ii. to provide practical evidences to national policy improvement for ethnic minority 2020-2030 development program on the urgent issues caused by hydropower projects;
- iii. to raise awareness of local people and society as a whole for the negative impacts of hydropower projects, as well as another economic investments affecting to livelihood, social and environmental issues.

Followings are some of CIRUM experience in AR approach

3. MAIN APPROACH

Step 1: Starting ideas for research based on affected community problems and challenges for their basic rights, such as rights to land for food security; rights to housing; rights to drinking water....

Step 2: Identifying ownership of the research and roles of participants involved. Community owns the research. To this end:

- Identifying community organizers¹ (CO) as representatives to lead and coordinate research activities, eg. how to collect information and evidences in a full and correct way with participatory; and to connect with other actors to make sure different stakeholders involved;
- COs are proactive to address challenges, questions, and thoughts of the local people. Especially COs themselves strengthen voices of local people (eg. Voice of women, youth, the old,...) to open their issues facing from economic investments.
- COs as representatives make conclusions, recommendations and suggested solutions

And:

- Local authorities at communal level reflect their opinions as state's roles to solve issues and work for protecting the rights of their people;
- Local authorities should provide information on legal documents for investments project implementation and challenges they face;
- Local authorities and local people have a common voice for getting final solutions.

CIRUM:

- Roles of CIRUM acts as facilitators helping community and authorities to get common understanding on research issues and objectives to make sure community issues can be solved by community themselves.
- Lawyer: acts as listener to discover gaps legal frame and practice in order to advise to local people followed legal approach

Step 3: Access to local government

It is helpful to use flexible approach to access to local government for permission formalities to implement the AR. Eg. CIRUM wrote to local government with title "lessons learnt from resettlement program and sustainable livelihood models" instead of title "impacts of hydropower on the rights of affected people" which we focused!

¹ Included roles of LandNet

Step 4²: COs are self-organizing and coordinating discussions for addressing their problems, challenges that have been affecting their basic rights as mentioned above

Step 5³ CIRUM together with the community people and local authorities make a full analysis respecting values of local culture, customary law and state law for the rights said above with clear evidences to make sure common understandings and concerns; drawing conclusions in a collective approach for the basic rights said above

Step 6: COs and local authorities mutually agree on said conclusions and recommendations on their rights and benefits of the community which need to be satisfied.

Step 7: Identify roles, responsibilities of community and local government with the supports from CIRUM (if any) or experts, lawyer (if necessary) so that to follow up activities

Step 8: Developing action plan for advocacy at local and national levels

Notes:

- AR required practical experience and expertise with well understanding on policies for issues on the ground so that he/she is able to consult, advise to local people and authorities for their awareness of the rights for affected people, as well as responsibilities of local government;
- It is important to look for local activists for implementing advocacy activities. To this end, NGOs should work closely with community people during the process to better understanding on what their strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats for further supports. It is also to see if they need supports from lawyers for legal formalities.
- It is needed to take photos, video or recording during the research process, but we should ask permission before.

² It is important for researchers to collect information as much as possible so that to understand investment chains (eg, financing institutions, investors, or violated legal documents,... so that to get pressure points for advocacy.

³ In the process of analysis, CIRUM should make used experiences as expertise for advice (eg, legal rights, policies, as well as our experts) to local authorities so that they are equipped better knowledge and more confident to work with the above levels for protecting the rights of their local people.