

PARTICIPATION IN RESETTLEMENT DECISION-MAKING BY DAM-DISPLACED VILLAGERS IN CENTRAL VIETNAM

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Abstract. Displacement of residents due to hydropower dam construction has often resulted in impoverishment, leading nations like Vietnam to enact legislation that improves dam resettlement conditions and compensation, including provisions for resettlement participation in resettlement decisions. In this case study, we examined the outcomes of dam-induced resettlement of four indigenous ethnic minority villages in a mountainous region in Quang Nam province, central Vietnam. Although villagers credited resettlement for improved infrastructure, strengthened social cohesion and access to education after resettlement, they were dissatisfied with housing stock and water provision. Village leaders were involved in village site selection, but a lack of sufficiently productive replacement land has threatened post-resettlement food security and caused residents to log and burn protected forest land for conversion to farmland. Resettlement of two villages to an area subject to periodic landslides has necessitated subsequent relocation, fomenting strong distrust of local government. The researchers conclude that a lack of meaningful participation in dam resettlement decision-making, constrained by institutional hurdles and negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities, as well as insufficient land provision, remain critical factors in effecting poor outcomes.

Dam-induced displacement, ethnic minorities, participation, resettlement policies

INTRODUCTION

Construction of large hydropower dams to satisfy rising electricity demand is burgeoning, particularly in the developing world. The International Commission on Large Dams currently lists 37,641 large dams in existence, defining large dams as at least 15 meters in height (ICOLD, 2012), mainly for hydropower generation, irrigation, flood control or multiple functions. Large dams have been the focus of increasing criticism in recent years on environmental and human rights grounds, for causing severe declines in local fisheries and degrading wildlife habitats, exacerbating risks of downstream flooding or drought, and forcing resettlement of local populations.

A majority of the estimated ten to 15 million people a year who are displaced by hydropower dam construction (Cernea, 2007) are reported to suffer at least temporary impoverishment, along with the stress and trauma associated with involuntary resettlement (Scudder, 2005). With governments ascribing to official development strategies aimed at universal poverty alleviation and enhancing living standards, the occurrence of dam-induced displacement, by which a segment of the population suffers to benefit the majority, dam-induced resettlement also raises profound ethical and humanitarian concerns.

Although dam construction promises local benefits such as employment, electricity supplies and irrigation for agriculture, most impacts of resettlement have been adverse, as identified by Cernea in his impoverishment risks and reconstruction framework (1990): loss of homes, land and livelihood; food insecurity; increased morbidity; economic marginalization; loss of access to common resources such as rivers and forests; and fragmentation of community ties and social networks. Dams are often constructed in remote, high-altitude upper river basins populated by indigenous ethnic minorities. Since ethnic minority residents often suffer from low income and educational levels and limited vocational skills to begin with, they are particularly hard hit by dam-induced displacement from traditional lands and livelihoods.

In a survey of 50 hydropower dam projects conducted worldwide, Scudder (2005) found that the majority of those resettled due to dam construction suffered impoverishment. While most displaced populations receive some monetary compensation for lost homes and property, compensation is often inadequate or delayed, and if they lack knowledge about investment in productive assets, the money may be squandered. Although replacement land is commonly allotted to displaced people, it is often less fertile than

the original river-fed plots, distant from new settlements, or land that has been appropriated from original residents without adequate compensation, causing conflict between host and resettled communities. Residents may lack the skills needed to adopt new livelihood practices such as animal husbandry or wet-rice farming at their new sites. Even when initial monetary compensation is adequate, funding and assistance linked development projects generally cease after the project's 5-10-year span is ended, and living conditions often deteriorate thereafter.

In response to these problems, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, which had been major lenders for large-scale dam projects, began revising criteria for investment and lending for dam construction in the 1980s and 1990s, augmenting conventional economic cost-benefit analysis with environmental impact assessments that included appraisal of potential socioeconomic impacts on affected populations and formulating resettlement guidelines. The World Bank in particular has been influential in fostering institutional safeguards for dam-induced resettlement since 1980 under the leadership of its former social science advisor, the sociologist Michael Cernea.

The underlying objective of the guidelines has been to ensure that resettled populations are able to restore or exceed previous living standards, assuming that any assessment of loss must also account for lost opportunity income during the resettlement and recovery period (Cernea, 2008). However, in recent years, opinion has shifted away from merely replacing lost income and towards repositioning resettlement as a type of comprehensive development project.

According to the revised resettlement safeguards adopted by the Asian Development Bank in 2009, resettlement should be regarded as an integral part of project design, and resettled populations “should be fully informed and closely consulted on resettlement and compensation options.”

In 1997 a group of academic, civil society, business and government large dam experts formed the World Commission on Dams to issue recommendations on environmental, social and economic impacts of large dam projects. Although the group itself was dissolved soon after issuing its 2000 report, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-making*, the reports' strategic priorities for dam policy decision-making greatly influenced subsequent large dam projects. The WCD report

identified five key values that should guide dam project implementation: participatory decision-making, equity, efficiency, accountability and sustainability. It recognized the rights of affected people as including the right to enter joint negotiations on mitigation, resettlement and development (2000). The WCD recommended prioritization of development needs and objectives over compensation aimed at recovering prior standards of living, and it proposed that “those groups facing the greatest risk from the development have the greatest stake in the decisions and, therefore, must have a corresponding place at the negotiating table (p. 240).” “Participation is particularly critical in regards to indigenous and tribal people,” the report said, and key decisions affecting them should be based on their “free, prior and informed consent” (p. 246).

Cernea and other resettlement experts concluded that writing guidelines for individual dam projects has less overall impact than institutionalizing equitable compensation and resettlement practices in national policy and legislation, and in recent years many developing nations have enacted their own resettlement laws, particularly governing asset assessment. Yet recent research has identified a continuing discrepancy between the institutional safeguards and participatory ideals embodied in national law and their actual implementation at the local level. The initial question for this study was whether an improved legal framework at the national level has translated into improved outcomes for dam-displaced residents of Vietnam, by examining four ethnic minority villages in Quang Nam province that were resettled in 2006 due to construction of a dam on the A Vuong river. The research sought to determine the impact of resettlement on livelihoods and living conditions, and to identify factors contributing to the two most problematic areas for policy implementation, land provision and participation in resettlement decision-making.

Dam development in Vietnam spurs reform

Energy demand in Vietnam has outpaced supplies in recent years, causing occasional brownouts or rolling blackouts during the dry summer months. Electricity demand is estimated to increase by 15-17% per year, with investments in the country’s power industry expected to reach US\$ 20 billion by 2020 (Dao, 2010). Hydropower accounted for 37.6 percent of total generation in 2010; its relative importance is expected to fall to 20 percent by 2020, although the volume of supplies will increase (Tran, 2011). Dam construction in Vietnam is overseen by EVN, Electricity of Vietnam, a national utility monopoly under the Ministry of Industry. As of 2011 there were 13 large-scale hydroelectric power plants across the country, with another 35 projects planned or under

construction (Bui and Schreinemachers, 2011).

In recent years Vietnam's large hydropower projects have garnered widespread criticism for causing environmental harm as well as deleterious socioeconomic impacts for resettled rural residents (see Dao, 2010 and Lam, 2008). In the late 20th century two large dams, Hoa Binh and Yali Falls, displaced 58,000 and 6,000 people, respectively, and as Dao reports, the affected villagers continued to suffer from high morbidity and food shortages for decades thereafter (2010). A recent survey (Pham, 2011) found that that 64.4 percent of Hoa Binh resettlers and 95.5 percent of those in Yali Falls reported that they are dissatisfied with their present living conditions. The 215m Son La dam in northern Vietnam, which will be fully operational in 2015, has already displaced some 91,000 people across three provinces. Food insecurity and economic marginalization has been reported for many of these residents (see VUSTA, 2006 and Bui and Schreinemachers, 2011).

In February 2000 Vietnam hosted the last Regional Consultations in East and Southeast Asia meeting of the WCD and in October 2002 the government sponsored a national workshop to discuss the outcomes of the WCD Dams and Development report, with cooperation from the Asian Development Bank. According to Dao (2010), at this meeting the central government lent its support to the WCD framework.

In 2002 Vietnam enacted the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPGS), which coordinates the activities of bilateral and multilateral aid donors that are currently active in Vietnam in a "pro-poor" approach that also enables Vietnam to qualify for World Bank and IMF credits (Friederichsen, 2008). Contiguous with these steps, the Vietnamese government was embarking on legal and political reform initiatives in the wake of the economic doi moi reforms initiated in 1986. Doi moi, which literally means "change and newness," was intended to foster gradual change to enable Vietnam to become a "market economy under Socialist direction" (Beresford, 2008). The reforms included a series of laws affecting dam development, including the 1993 Law on Environmental Protection, requiring environmental impact assessments for dam and other large-scale infrastructure projects that included assessment of local socioeconomic impacts. Successive land laws ceded land use rights and allowed residents to transfer or lease land use rights for financial gain. This also established the basis for compensation of resettled farmers for land they had previously cultivated.

Laws such as the Grassroots Democratization Decree (Decree No. 29 ND/CP) of 1998, which was enacted in response to serious incidences of rural unrest in Vietnam in the late 1990s, increased the scope of residents' participation in commune decision-making for local investments and development projects. A series of laws specifically governing compensation, support and resettlement for land recovery by the state set out detailed provisions for food support, agricultural training, and other types of support for resettled households. As indicated in Figure 1, the legislation in succeeding years spelled out terms of compensation and support that were increasingly favorable for displaced households. It also shifted responsibility for overseeing compensation and resettlement site preparation from investors to local governments, reflecting the assumption that the local government would have more knowledge and concern than a hydropower authority about the needs of local residents.

Figure 1: Legislation affecting resettlement policy

Year	Law/Decree	Significance
1993	Law on Environmental Protection	Requires environmental impact assessment for dam projects (includes social impact), including local comments (revised in 2005)
1993	Land Law (land tenure reform)	Land users can transfer or lease land use rights, are entitled to compensation for loss of land
1998	Decree 22/1998/ND-CP	Legal land users receive compensation for land and assets; investors must construct resettlement sites
1998	Decree 29/1998/ND-CP (Grassroots Democratization Decree)	Local residents can decide on commune-level development spending, must be informed about and allowed to comment on resettlement issues (revised in 2003 and 2007)
2003	Revised Land Law	Cedes responsibility for resettlement implementation to local government, rather than project authority
2004	Decree 197/2004/ND-CP	Relaxes conditions for deciding compensation
2007	Decree 84/2007/ND-CP	Further spells out obligations for land compensation
2009	Decree 69/2009/ND-CP	Discusses settlement of land disputes
2010	Decree 34/2010/QD-TTg	If replacement land is of lower value than original holdings, resettled households may receive compensation for difference

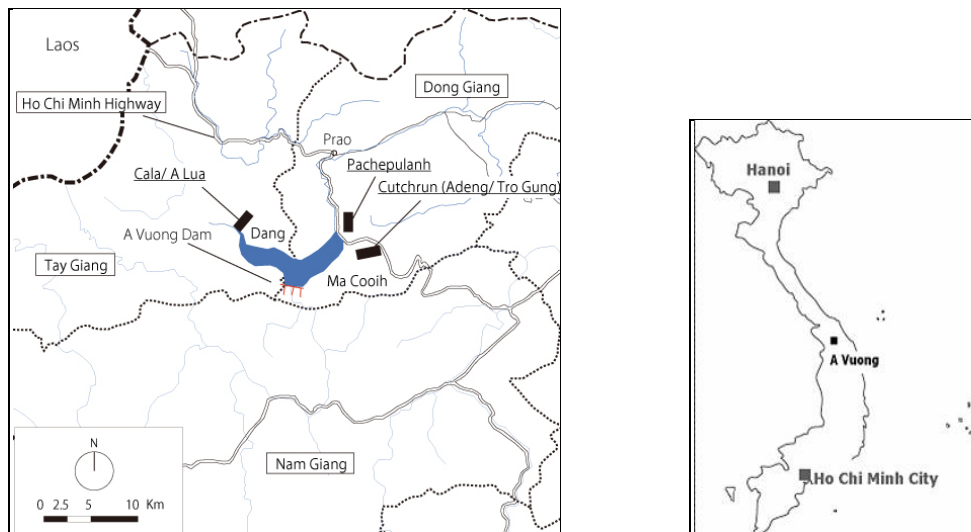
Source: Informed by Dao, 2011

About the research site

The research under review was conducted in 2011 and 2012 at four villages that were resettled due to construction of the A Vuong dam and hydropower generating facility in Ma Cooih commune, Dong Giang district, Quang Nam Province in central Vietnam (see Figure 2). The dam was completed in 2006; the hydroelectric power plant was

inaugurated in July 2010 and currently supplies 815 million kilowatts of electricity per year (VOV Online, 2010). The reservoir has a capacity of 343.5 million cubic meters. The total site population is 1,071 residents, of whom more than 95% of are from the Co-tu ethnic minority; non-Co-tu residents include schoolteachers and local officials as well as a few small-scale merchants. The Co-tu, who mainly reside in Quang Nam and Thua Thien-Hue provinces, traditionally practiced shifting cultivation, hunting and livestock husbandry. The villagers originally lived beside the A Vuong river, a tributary of the Vu Gia river in Ma Cooih commune, Dong Giang district, but they were resettled to three different locations. Two of these locations, in Ma Cooih commune, Dong Giang district, and in Dang commune, Tay Giang district, are examined here. The two adjacent villages in the Ma Cooih commune site, Aden and Tro Gung, are approximately 20 kilometers from the reservoir, far from the A Vuong River, while the Dang commune villages (Cala and A Lui) are on the riverbank less than 2 kilometers upriver from the reservoir.

Figure 2: Map of Study Area



Source: Yoshiko Matsuda, 2012

From 2011 to early 2013 fifty-eight semi-structured interviews and six focus group interviews were conducted with villagers at both sites. A survey on income, livelihoods and living conditions was administered to 120 households in Ma Cooih commune in 2012. Interviews were also conducted with village, commune and district officials.

The resettled households in Ma Cooih commune were each allocated a site measuring

400 square meters for residential land, while those in Dang commune, because they occupy a narrow riverbank site, each received only 200-250 square meters of land (Asian Development Bank, 2007). Each village, containing two villages, was provided with roads, a primary school, piped drinking water, and electricity, and Cala village contains a medical clinic staffed by a doctor and medic.

A total of 330 households were resettled, and an additional 50 households lost land due to dam construction. According to government records, each resettled household was compensated an average of 448 million dong (approximately US\$20,000 as of May 2012) for land, house and other assets (Asian Development Bank, 2007), funded by the nation's largest power company, Vietnam Electricity (EVN). However, villagers in Ma Cooih commune reported much lower amounts, claiming to have only received 75 million dong (US\$3,348) for compensation for their homes and additional compensation for land, crops, fruit trees and other assets that ranged from 700,000 to 150 million dong (US\$6,696).

Terms of compensation and provision of services to resettled households were decided in line with the legislation in effect at the time of resettlement, Decree No. 197/2004/ND-CP, although subsequent legislation stipulated more generous compensation. As required by law, a committee on compensation was established to decide terms of compensation at existing local market rates. Householders could be recompensed in cash for homes, land and loss of annual and perennial crops, and productive trees and fish ponds. They also received a small moving allowance and 10 kilograms of rice per month per person for the first two years. Land compensation was paid for plots not claimed by other residents that the petitioner could prove to district officials was currently or had been under cultivation. Several meetings were held in each village to discuss resettlement and make site selection and other decisions, according to the district People's Party secretary for Dong Giang district.

By law the villagers were entitled to "discuss or comment on" decisions related to compensation for infrastructure or resettlement (Decree No. 79/2003/ND-CP, Chapter IV Article 10 No. 7), and 116 of 120 responding householders in Ma Cooih commune indicated in the 2012 survey that they had attended pre-resettlement meetings sponsored by the district government. However, the headman of one village stated that villagers didn't know about specific details and left site selection to the elder who recommended the site. In meetings people just listened; few raised their hands to speak, he noted

(2012).

Each village was offered a selection of two sites for resettlement, mainly uncontested or abandoned land. Village and commune officials visited both sites at least once before making their choice. According to one village head and an elected elder, the selected site was in nearer proximity to the forest for easy access to firewood, and it featured level land that was easier to build homes on.

The households were resettled as village units, with single-family 40-50-square-meter wooden homes on piles, of uniform size and construction, contracted to a local private contractor. The householders were provided with limited choices of housing style; many expressed dislike of the elevated construction of their new homes as being impractical and dangerous for families with elderly members or small children. Said one young male resident:

We were told that we could select a Kinh or Co-tu style house. Most wanted a low Kinh-style house but the government officials said that it would be better to build a Co-tu-style house (on piles) to maintain our traditions.

In interviews most residents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality or comfort of their homes. In many homes the wooden stairs were soon battered by storms and detached toilets suffered plumbing and mechanical breakdowns (in the questionnaire 93 of 119 households in Ma Cooih commune reported that their toilet, stairs, or both had been broken). None of these households received compensation or assistance for repairs, and many residents now defecate in nearby fields or streams. Securing adequate water supplies for drinking and irrigation was also cited as a pressing problem by a March 2012 focus group in Aden, Ma Cooih commune.

The greatest source of dissatisfaction, however, was with the land (see Figure 3). Prior to the move, the villages had been sited beside the river, where land was fertile and well-watered enough for paddy rice production, but the upland, rain-fed replacement plots tend to be of low fertility. According to the villagers in a 2012 focus group in Ma Cooih, the productivity of their new plots has diminished each year since the move, with rice and cassava harvests halved from pre-resettlement levels in volume per hectare. Much of the land near the resettlement villages has been designated as protected forest land, unavailable for cultivation, and villagers have been directed to practice sedentary farming on the plots they received, but to increase production many villagers continue

to practice shifting cultivation on protected forest land, exacerbating local deforestation and habitat loss for endemic wildlife.

Figure 3 Focus Group Ranking of Post-resettlement Problems

	Aden	Tro Gung
1)	Shortage of land for cultivation	Shortage of land for cultivation
2)	Livestock morbidity	Lack of irrigation for paddy fields
3)	Lack of fresh water, especially in dry season	Lack of fresh water during dry season
4)	Hunting is restricted	Need for adaptive seed varieties

Source: Focus groups in Aden village, March 13, 2012 and Tro Gung village, January 13, 2012

The amount of land initially received in compensation, including upland plots and paddy fields, was deemed insufficient by villagers due to its poor productivity and their lack of access to fertilizer or manure. According to Tay Giang district officials, of the total of 126 households in Dang commune, 45 of them, comprising 196 persons, did not receive the total amount of agricultural land and/or residence that had been promised by the hydropower authority (Bhling, 2011). According to one online media report (VietNamNet, May 31, 2012), the dam authority promised each household 1.5 hectares of land for agricultural production but in fact they were only provided 0.2 hectares. According to questionnaire responses, however, most of the villagers in Ma Cooih commune now farm between 1-2 hectares of upland plots and 0.7 hectares of paddy fields. The additional land includes pre-resettlement plots and those developed subsequently through clearing forests or unclaimed land.

Villagers formerly relied on riverine fisheries for supplemental food supplies, but fish stocks in the river declined after dam construction and villagers were not allowed by the district government to fish or farm in draw-down reservoir areas due to dam authority concerns about pollution of water stocks (conversation with District Party secretary, 2011). Many villagers noted that although they grew vegetables in their original sites they now were forced to mainly rely on less nutritious cassava as a secondary food source, particularly during pre-harvest periods when rice supplies were depleted. Said a village headman: “Food sufficiency was better before than today. We could catch fish and save it for the months when food was short but now we often lack sufficient food. We can’t go into the forest to get food to eat and we try to fish but can’t catch much, so food supplies are unstable.”

Livestock production, primarily cattle and buffalo, pigs and poultry, declined after resettlement. Livestock is regarded as an important revenue source and conserved for offering for marriage and traditional rituals, but a lack of suitable land for foraging, and insufficient animal shelters and a lack of feed has constrained production. In the 2012 questionnaire only 13 of the 76 households in Aden and 12 of the 45 households reported ownership of one or more pigs.

Economic conditions in relocated villages

Indigenous ethnic minorities in Vietnam generally report high rates of poverty. A team of economists led by Baulch in 2002 found that minorities in the Central Highlands showed the lowest levels of education and household income of any surveyed Vietnamese ethnic groups and that improvement in income had stagnated since the economic reforms of the previous decade, although averages for all other groups had risen.

According to the ADB Rapid Appraisal Report (2006), the average poverty rates for the two communes under study in 2006 were 68% for Ma Cooih commune and 65% for Dang commune (ADB, 2007). According to an official with Ma Cooih commune, approximately 70% of the commune was designated as “poor” as of June 2011, while the remaining 30% were “near-poor” (from personal conversation with Phan Huy Tuan, June 27, 2011). For the resettled villages the percentages are even higher, with 92% poor and 8% near poor in Aden and 94% poor and 6% near-poor in Tro Gung, according to the headmen of the two villages (2012). (The official poverty line for rural areas in Vietnam is 400,000 VND per person per month, while those with per capita monthly income of 401,000-520,000 are “near-poor.” The nationwide average of poor is 14.2% (Vietnam Statistics Office, 2010)

Natural disaster risks force re-resettlement

Since resettlement to the narrow riverbank sites in 2006, the Dang commune villages of Cala and A Lua have suffered from severe erosion and mudslides during the annual rainy season. The elected headmen and a few residents of the villages visited two proposed sites before resettlement, but there were varying reports on how the final siting decision was reached. District officials stated that the villagers chose their current site due to its proximity to the river. One villager agreed, but he professed to not knowing about the site’s high risks of erosion and storm-linked mudslides and of having limited time to decide. Two other villagers claimed that the site was not the villagers’ choice

due to its potential disaster risks, but that it was selected by the hydropower authority because it contained valuable timber that the hydropower authority could log for additional income before constructing the village.

A storm in 2009 caused the destruction of eight homes in the two villages, according to the district government (Bhling, 2011). In November 2011, a student dormitory and a commune office building in Cala village were destroyed by a landslide during heavy rains. Recognizing the continuing disaster risk, local commune and district officials began negotiations with the householders in 2010 about relocating to new sites located several kilometers from the river. However, many villagers were resisting the new move, citing inadequate compensation and lack of infrastructure at the new sites. This time, financing for relocation would need to come for the district's straitened coffers, rather than as part of the dam construction project as before, according to the district Party secretary (2010). Although district officials were negotiating with the dam authority to offset some of the relocation costs, the move would not be legally categorized as a dam resettlement initiative but simply as a livelihood enhancement development project; thus relatively generous resettlement project compensation conditions would not apply. Villagers, while cognizant of future landslide risks, were insisting on compensation similar to amounts offered during their previous move. Despite frequent meetings of village residents and commune and district officials, the two sides remained at odds through early 2012, with one villager saying: "We'd rather die here than move to the new site if our conditions aren't met. We want to see the money in our hands before we consent to moving." (It was reported by district officials (Hoang, 2012) that both villages moved to new sites in late 2012, with a budget of 30 million dong allotted for each household to cover the costs of moving, infrastructure construction and land preparation. No compensation was paid.)

Discussion

According to a World Bank document by the Independent Evaluation Group (2011), the seven factors that determine whether resettlement projects succeed include government or agency commitment, a strong implementing agency, an appropriate legal framework, comprehensive planning, development programs that support livelihoods after the move with land and irrigation schemes, community involvement and local leadership, and realistic cost estimates. Local government implementation, community participation and land issues are particular sources of concern in Vietnam.

Researchers have long criticized implementation of Vietnamese national policies by local governments and poor community involvement (see Dao, 2010; Fritzen, 2006; Kerkvliet and Marr, 2004). The strong centralized control retained by the Vietnamese Communist party, noted Friederichsen (2009), has set up many obstacles to achieving participatory community-based development, including a lack of incentives for local bureaucrats to make decisions that may conflict with higher-level policies, a lack of capacity due to poor training of local officials administering village-level development budgets, and a lack of an independent body for adjudicating grievances involving local officials. Fritzen (2006) laid blame on resistance by central government to devolving decision-making authority to local bureaucrats and poor local governance capabilities for the sketchy success of decentralization efforts in recent years. A 2002 survey by the National Institute of Administration found that more than three-fourths of People's Council and People's committee officials lacked specific training for the positions to which they had been assigned (Kerkvliet, 2004). Local officials are often squeezed between the need to implement national or province directives and conflicting desires of local residents.

In Vietnam, local government functions at the village, commune, district and province level. A commune contains several villages, and each village has an elected chief and vice-chief as well as an appointed administrative head. Commune officials are often local residents, but they tend to have little direct authority. Village heads may have the support and trust of village residents, but there are no laws specifically laying out their administrative roles and authority (Kerkvliet and Marr, 2004). In the case of the Quang Nam villages, involvement by commune officials was limited to a few agricultural and livelihood initiatives after resettlement. For example, as seen in Figure 4, neither village residents nor commune or district officials sat on the hydropower compensation council.

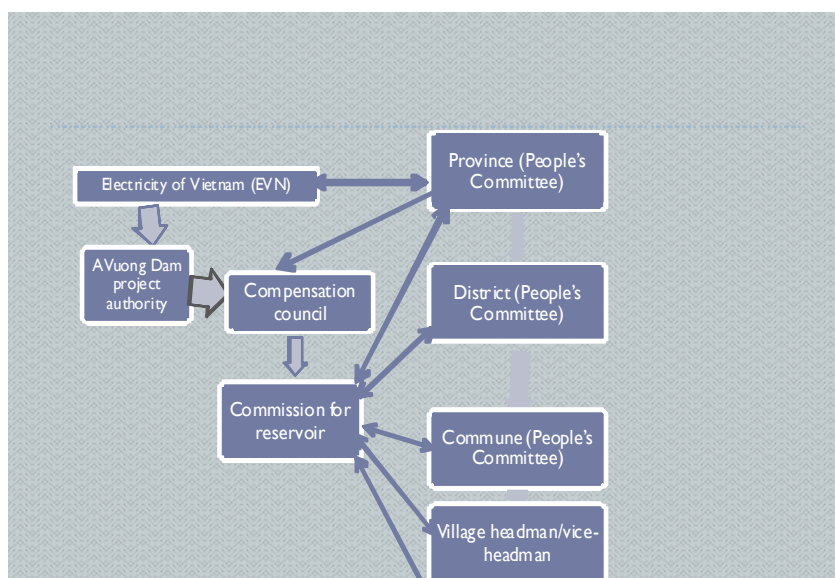


Figure 4 Local resettlement governance

As traditional Vietnamese folk sayings like “The emperor’s rule stops at the village gate” (quoted in Fritzen, 2006) suggest, local implementation of directives from the administrative center has traditionally been influenced by local contingencies and the will of provincial bureaucrats. In the case of hydropower dams in remote highland areas, where most of the generated electricity and revenues flow to coastal cities while adverse environmental and socioeconomic impacts are borne locally, provincial governments may lack enthusiasm for rigorous project implementation.

The prospects for meaningful participation in the case of development project decisions for indigenous ethnic minority communities are further reduced by the local bureaucrats’ distrust of the ability of residents to act in their own best interests and the passivity often evidenced at village-level meetings. Scott, Miller and Lloyd (2006) write that “negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and a devaluing of indigenous knowledge persist” (p. 32), making it more difficult for minorities to assume active roles.

One district official admitted that local residents’ involvement in decision-making was inadequate when he said: “We should have given more rights to the people and we should have done more to prepare the new sites. The government doesn’t need to build houses for people; let them build them by themselves (2011).”

The Vietnamese government has formulated a series of nationwide poverty alleviation efforts aimed at ethnic minorities to overcome expanding income inequality between majority Kinh and ethnic minorities during the past two decades of fast-paced economic growth (Glewwe, Gragnolati and Zaman, 2002). Projects like the nationwide Program 135 have targeted the poorest villages (many of them predominantly ethnic minority

communities) in an effort to raise living standards and foster livelihoods. However, according to an Asian Development Bank project report (2010, p. 7), “the ways in which the government has given this support has promoted dependency, low self-esteem and passivity, rather than promoting empowerment, social capital and capacity in the villages.” For example, as Fritzen (2006) explains, Program 135 cedes authority for decisions on investing funds to province and district officials rather than commune or village-level officials and residents, who may be considered unable to make educated decisions. According to the 2010 ADB report, behind this practice is a “patriarchal approach” that considers ethnic minorities as “victims rather than actors in development” who need help to catch up with the majority Kinh. The desirability of ethnic minorities adopting majority Kinh values and practices is implicitly recognized by legislation such as Decree No. 79/2003/ND-CP, which promotes village participation in “building a civilized lifestyle, maintenance of security and order, abolition of bad practices, superstition and social evils” (Article 7, No. 2).

As researchers have noted in books like *Participation: The new tyranny* (2001), the discourse of “participation” can veil an underlying asymmetry of power and information that handicaps poor residents, limiting the potential for their meaningful inclusion in decision-making. Certainly, most dam resettlement is inherently involuntary, and as De Wet wrote (2009, p.79), infrastructure projects involving forced resettlement “simultaneously promote and undermine human well-being,” benefitting the majority but violating the human rights of displaced populations. Chatty (2002, p. 11) posits a typology of participation by indigenous peoples in development projects that includes passive participation (unilateral announcements by project management) or participation in information-giving only.

A 2006 study of the impacts of the Son La dam project by the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA) identified as two major problems the “serious shortage of qualified and trained personnel at district-level Resettlement Management Units,” and the shortage of sufficient arable land, making it difficult to fulfill the promise of “land for land” compensation. Land is a scarce resource in mountainous Vietnam. According to the World Bank (2002), although 80% of the population lives in rural areas, there is only 1,200 square meters of agricultural land per person, one of the lowest per capita volumes in the world. Said one district administrator involved in the A Vuong dam project, “land and livelihoods have been the biggest problems.” Another bureaucrat admitted, “We lacked the money to purchase

enough productive land” (personal conversations, 2011).

In research on other dam resettlement projects in Vietnam, the single greatest impediment to recovery is typically the loss of productive land (see Dao, 2010; Bui and Schreinemachers, 2011). Ethnic minority populations are growing (from 13.8% in 1989 to 14.3% of the population in 2009), as they generally have higher fertility rates than the Kinh Vietnamese (Amin and Bassarawan, 2009). In addition, government-supported migration of lowland Kinh residents to highland areas has increased, with ethnic minorities now estimated to account for only one-third of the total population of the Central Highlands, an area that was once nearly exclusively settled by indigenous minority residents (Scott and Truong, 2004). Increased population density in mountainous regions with limited arable land challenges the capacity of local governments to secure sufficient replacement land despite their legal obligation to do so.

Conclusion

As the case study in Quang Nam province suggests, marked improvements in national law and policy for resettlement terms and support have not been accompanied by improved implementation and outcomes at the local level, particularly in terms of productive land and opportunities for participation in decision-making. Although residents at the case study sites value improved infrastructure and access to education and health care, they find fault with poor-quality housing and food insecurity, as domestic livestock has failed to thrive, rice yields have fallen and river fisheries have declined. The inability to secure arable land has also led to environmental degradation, as farmers have destroyed protected forests for conversion to agricultural plots. Although the district government offered villagers some input in resettlement decision-making, they were constrained by poor site or housing selections. In one case, a lack of informed participation by residents led to a failed resettlement in an area prone to natural disasters. It is clear that unmet expectations can cause lingering resentment by local residents of government intentions and cloud prospects for environmentally and economically sustainable development.

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