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Stung Cheay Areng hydroelectric dam in Koh Kong, Cambodia



Description:

The Areng valley in the Cardamom Mountains has become a contested area due to hydroelectric dam proposals that would entail massive negative impacts on people and the environment. The area is inhabited by the Chong people, an ethnic minority of the traditional Khmer people (Khmer Daeum), who are said to live in the forests for more than 600 years [1]. The Cardamom Mountains are also a well-known biodiversity hotspot, providing the world largest habitat for Siamese crocodiles and other 31 endangered species [1-2].

Since 2006, three Chinese companies showed interest in developing the dam, which is one of 17 dams the government plans to construct in the next 20 years to cover energy needs and to become a main energy exporter in the region [1]. However, the site was shown to be largely inappropriate for dam development [3] and consequently, the first company stopped their intentions due to moral reasons and the irreversible social and environmental costs the project would entail [2]. The second company lost interest after the project seemed to result: economically unviable.

However, the third company, Chinese giant Sinohydro, decided to move forward in spite of feasibility doubts and dramatic social and environmental costs [2]. According to newspaper reports, the deal was brokered by ruling party (CPP) senator Lao Meng Khin, involved in other controversial development projects, and further well connected to the logging industry [2]. According to environmentalist group Mother Nature, the project is moreover motivated by related timber logging groups, which would gain access to Cambodia's prime forests and luxury rosewood due to clearing the area for the reservoir [4]. (Illegal) rosewood trade is a million-dollar business in Cambodia [2].

The dam will lead to the replacement and destruction of livelihoods of 1,500 people from nine villages and the flooding of 10,000 to 20,000 ha primary forest [1,2]. Downstream communities will be drastically affected by loss of riverside agriculture and swamp forest fishery [5]. Buddhist groups fear that with the loss of forests, also their spirits will lose their homes [1]. While large social, ecological, economic and cultural costs thus will be carried by local communities and the environment, profits will benefit mainly external actors, such as foreign construction companies. Moreover, most of the energy is planned to be exported to neighboring Thailand and Vietnam [1,2]. After 40 years of operation, dam ownership will be transferred to the Cambodian Government; however this is exactly when maintenance costs usually start to rise significantly [1].

Protests and resistance by local communities, monks and environmental activists have increased significantly. In 2013 they founded the local NGO Mother Nature, which started campaigning against the project [4]. On March 4th, 2014, a group of monks from Phnom Penh started a 240km protest march to the Areng Valley to support the communities. However, resistance activities faced repression. On September 15, 2014, 11 environmental activists were detained for blocking a governmental convoy and the Cambodian army was stationed at the construction site to protect the project [1]. Activist and co-founder of Mother Nature Alex Gonzalez-Davidson was threatened by the Government to leave the country, denying him renewal of his visa [6], while others are facing summons [7]. The prime minister said the decision to proceed has been postponed to 2018, and meanwhile, feasibility studies will be conducted [7]. Other ministers however stated earlier that the project will go on [2].

Basic Data

Name of conflict:

Stung Cheay Areng hydroelectric dam in Koh Kong, Cambodia

Country:

Cambodia ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country/cambodia](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country/cambodia))

State or province:

Koh Kong province

Location of conflict:

Thmor Bang District (Cardamom Mountains)

Accuracy of location

HIGH (Local level)

Source of Conflict

Type of conflict. 1st level:

Water Management

Type of conflict. 2nd level:

Land acquisition conflicts
Dams and water distribution conflicts

Specific commodities:

Electricity ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/commodity/electricity](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/commodity/electricity))
Timber ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/commodity/timber](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/commodity/timber))
Water ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/commodity/water](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/commodity/water))

Project Details and Actors

Project details

The hydroelectric dam has a planned capacity of 108 Megawatt [7].

This corresponds to an energy provision for 87,000 US style households during rainy season. Provision however will go down to 46% of capacity during dry season, when Cambodia's energy demand however is the highest [1].

Investment size was reported to amount to 327 million US dollar [3].

Reservoir size will cover between 10,000 and 20,000 ha [3]

The company working as consultant (impact assessments etc.) is Sawac Consultants for Development.

Project area:

10,000 - 20,000ha

Level of Investment for the conflictive project

327,000,000

Type of population

Rural

Affected Population:

1,500 directly affected (not counting for downstream impacts)

Start of the conflict:

01/10/2006

Company names or state enterprises:

China Guodian Corporation (China Guodian) ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/company/china-guodian-corporation](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/company/china-guodian-corporation)) from China ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country-of-company/china](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country-of-company/china))
Sawac Consultants for Development Ltd. (Sawac) ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/company/sawac-consultants-for-development-ltd](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/company/sawac-consultants-for-development-ltd)) from Cambodia ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country-of-company/cambodia](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country-of-company/cambodia)) - consultancy, impact assessments
Sinohydro Corporation Limited (Sinohydro) ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/company/sinohydro-corporation-limited](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/company/sinohydro-corporation-limited)) from China ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country-of-company/china](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country-of-company/china))
China Southern Power Grid (CSG) ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/company/china-souther-power-grid](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/company/china-souther-power-grid)) from China ([/web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country-of-company/china](https://web/20220610092918/https://ejatlas.org/country-of-company/china)) - hydroelectric power, dams.

Relevant government actors:

Lao Meng Khin senator (CPP)
Cheung Sopheap (wife of Lao Meng Khin)

Environmental justice organizations (and other supporters) and their websites, if available:

Directly involved:
 Mother Nature; Khmer Youth Empire; Independent Monk Network for Social Justice.
 Further involved: International Rivers, Conservation International, Wildlife Alliance, Flora and Fauna International, and others

Conflict & Mobilization**Intensity**

HIGH (widespread, mass mobilization, violence, arrests, etc...)

Reaction stage

PREVENTIVE resistance (precautionary phase)

Groups mobilizing:

Farmers
 Indigenous groups or traditional communities
 International ejos
 Local ejos
 Ethnically/racially discriminated groups
 Religious groups
 Fisher people

Forms of mobilization:

Blockades
 Development of a network/collective action
 Media based activism/alternative media
 Public campaigns
 Street protest/marches
 Arguments for the rights of mother nature

Impacts**Environmental Impacts**

Potential: Food insecurity (crop damage), Loss of landscape/aesthetic degradation, Deforestation and loss of vegetation cover, Large-scale disturbance of hydro and geological systems, Reduced ecological / hydrological connectivity, Surface water pollution / Decreasing water (physico-chemical, biological) quality, Biodiversity loss (wildlife, agro-diversity), Groundwater pollution or depletion

Health Impacts

Potential: Mental problems including stress, depression and suicide

Socio-economical Impacts

Potential: Displacement, Militarization and increased police presence, Land dispossession
Potential: Loss of traditional knowledge/practices/cultures, Violations of human rights, Loss of landscape/sense of place, Loss of livelihood

Outcome**Project Status**

Planned (decision to go ahead eg EIA undertaken, etc)

Conflict outcome / response:

Criminalization of activists
 Repression
 Strengthening of participation
 Under negotiation

Proposal and development of alternatives:

According to local NGO Mother Nature, their central proposal is "To stop the Chhay Areng hydro-electric dam from being approved at all costs, due to the massive impact it would have on the whole Cardamom forests and on the lives of the local indigenous Jong communities;" [4]

Do you consider this an environmental justice success? Was environmental justice served?:

Not Sure

Briefly explain:

It is not yet clear what the outcome will be, though currently it seems that the project will go on.

Sources & Materials**References to published books, academic articles, movies or published documentaries**

[5] IR 2008. Cambodia's Hydropower Development and China's Involvement. International Rivers & Rivers Coalition in Cambodia. (accessed 02/03/2015)
http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/attached-files/cambodia_hydropower_and_chinese_involvement_jan_2008.pdf

[1] Mother Jones online article (19/10/204): "Will Cambodia Flood a sacred and Biodiverse Valley for a Dubious Dam?"
<http://www.motherjones.com/print/262811>

[2] New York Times article online (28/07/2014): "A Threat to Cambodia's Sacred Forests" (accessed 02/03/2015)
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/29/opinion/a-threat-to-cambodias-sacred-forests.html?_r=0

[3] Comparison of performance of different dams in the regions, as provided by Mother Nature (accessed 02/03/2015)
<http://mothenature.pm/Chart%20comparing%20Areng%20dam%20with%20other%20dams%20in%20terms%20of%20cost%20%2B%20reservoir%20%2B%20power%20output.jpg>

[4] Website of Mother Nature (NGO)
<http://mothenature.pm/>

[6] Phnom Penh Post article (14/02/2015): "Areng Valley dam activist given marching orders" (accessed 02/03/2015)
<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/areng-valley-dam-activist-given-marching-orders>

[7] Phnom Penh Post article (02/03/2015) "Activist summoned over alleged crimes" (accessed 02/03/2015)
<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/activist-summoned-over-alleged-crimes>

Open Development on hydropower in Cambodia
<http://www.opendevdevelopmentcambodia.net/briefing/hydropower/>

Wikipedia on the dam
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheay_Areng_Dam

Related media links to videos, campaigns, social network

New York Times video on the conflict
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5pHq4D4RQ>

"Fight for Areng Valley". Video made by filmmaker Kalyanee Mam
<https://vimeo.com/110822073>

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1832

Images



Villagers and monks block the access to the development site
Source: <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/eco-groups-slam-areng-dam> (accessed 02/03/2015)