A PERSPECTIVE ON THE AKOSOMBO RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE IN GHANA
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In light of the Ghanaian government’s support for application of the Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Protocol in the country, Richard Twum, Executive Secretary at Ghana Dams Dialogue, was asked to share a perspective of resettlement in the country. This paper describes the sole author’s perspective of the resettlement experience, and intends to stimulate discussion on the topic ahead of the IHA World Hydropower Congress 2015.

Introduction
Whilst ecological impacts are an important issue around the construction of new dams, the social and health impacts particularly resettlement questions are the immediate impacts that affected people are faced with even prior to dam completion.

Ghana’s history of dam construction for irrigation and hydropower dates back to the early 60’s with many dams being constructed for irrigation purposes. However it was only with the construction of the Akosombo Dam on the Volta River that the problems around resettlement emerged. With a planned capacity of 960MW, increased to 1020MW after retrofitting, the project provides substantial national benefits in terms of fishing, irrigation for farming, inland water transport, and tourism among others. Unfortunately the dam required resettlement of 80,000 persons and inundated a total land size of 8,502 square kilometres, and even today, 50 years after the construction, there has not been complete resolution of the issues resulting from this resettlement.

Experiences of resettlement and compensation in Ghana – the process
The overriding legislation in force during the resettlement and compensation process around the Akosombo was the Volta River Development Act 46, which empowered Volta River Authority (VRA) to acquire lands for various activities in the discharge of its functions. The Act also prescribed compensation and mitigation or restoration measures for people affected by the Akosombo and Kpong projects. Other key legal provisions which are used in relation to acquisition and compensation in Ghana for dam development include: the State Lands Act (1962) Act 125; Administration of Lands Act (1962) Act 123; the Public Conveyance Act 1965 (Act 302) and the Mineral and Mining Act 2006 (Act 703), recently supplemented by the Bui Power Authority Act (2007) Act 740 (BPA Act). The BPA Act has powers similar to the VRA Act, but with independent jurisdiction over the Black Volta. Prior to these two dams, the experience with resettlement in Ghana was gained from two smaller resettlement schemes in the country, the Damango resettlement (required as a result of overpopulation) and the Tema village resettlement (for the proposed construction of a harbour).

The guiding principles on which the general policy for resettlement of the government of Ghana (GOG) is based is that that nobody should be made worse off by the implementation of government projects. Thus the main objectives of compensation are to:

- Replace asset losses.
- Restore and enhance the livelihood of affected people through land allotment for sustainable agriculture and facilities and opportunities for fishing and other forms of economic activities.
- Ensure affected people’s primary services such as schooling and health care facilities are available.
- Ensure minimum disruption in their social organization and assist them to develop viable social relations.
- Ensure affected people share adequately in benefits from projects.

The key question remains as to how these laudable sentiments get translated into action, and in the face of the principles, is there room for improvement with current practice. For the Akosombo and Kpong projects
serious efforts were made to achieve the first three objectives namely, restoration of lost assets, enhancements of livelihood as well as the provision of primary services. The same level of focus was not given to the last two objectives namely, minimum disruption in social organization and adequate sharing in project benefits (Kalitsi, 2008).

Setbacks and key lessons learned

The Akosombo Hydropower Project affected 78,000 people in 756 villages in the flooded area. They were resettled in 52 newly created settlements along the newly formed lake. In the 52 resettlement villages, 13,000 houses were constructed, 6 wells and 34 mechanical and 23 hand pumps were installed. Also, about 500 miles of roads were built, and approximately 100,000 ha of farmland established.

In reviewing the resettlement process of Akosombo, the following salient points are noteworthy.

• Because of the poor communication network, and the wide scatter of smaller villages and hamlets, little was known of the people living in the basin, and some were so hidden that they had never paid tax or been counted in census. As a result, the Volta compensation and resettlement operations had to begin by looking for the people and finding out more about them.

• Land was considered to have a very little value and as such it was left to individual claimants to establish their rights. This valuation arrangement delayed delivery of critical information on compensation entitlement of affected people and became a source of complaint about inadequacy of coverage and pricing of properties.

• On the other hand, government accepted in principle liability for paying a disturbance element for the loss of numerous fetishes in the flooded area, in whose potency the locals had widespread belief. The guidelines for compensation were very comprehensive.

• The original agricultural resettlement program for the PAPs of Akosombo provided for modern mechanized farming on 430,000 acres, on a co-operative basis. In spite of pilot testing, these plans failed due to the difficulties encountered in implementing the program such as the inability to achieve clearing targets, delays in assembly of agricultural equipment and in delivery of farming inputs like seeds, fertilizers and insecticides. Another factor was the lack of familiarity with new farming practices, and the absence of motivated extension workers with resources, technical skills and logistics to support the farmers. The program had to change its approach to individual allocation (1.21 ha), for subsistence farming using traditional methods, plus an allowance of double that per family, pooled together for developing commercial farms.

VRA Resettlement Trust fund.

The VRA Resettlement Trust Fund, set up with the objective to monitor the conditions of the settlements and serves as a buffer to ward off pressures on the government, VRA and Members of Parliament from the settlers, was established in July 1996, 30 years after the commissioning of the dam. It has the following composition of trustees: a Chairman appointed by the Minister of Energy, ten Members of Parliament in whose constituencies the 52 settlement towns are located, two representatives from VRA, three from the Ministry of Energy, and one additional Trustee appointed in consultation between the Ministry and the Trustees.

For the settlers it also provides a convenient forum for their concerns to be channeled to the appropriate bodies for solution. The Fund’s effectiveness would be enhanced even further if the Trustees add on an active and persistent advocacy role on behalf of the settlers.

The main source of financing for activities of the Trust Fund has been an annual grant of $500,000 USD from VRA. This amounts to the meager amount of 6 USD annually per head per settler, well short of requirements under current economic conditions. Fortunately, in addition the Trust has been able to access resources through the Ministry of Energy for extension of electricity to all the settlements. It also collaborates with
other agencies such as the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) and some NGOs to provide water for some of the settlements.

However, financing limitation remains a major constraint in pursuing the Trust’s objectives. In order to mitigate this, the Trust developed proposals to mobilize additional financial resources to support its activities. A key challenge facing the Trust Fund is how to integrate the settlers into mainstream society of the local communities, in the face of hostilities against the settlers because of non-payment by VRA and Government of compensation due to the land owners.

Conclusions

The Akosombo scheme has highlighted particular and important issues around retaining a stable social structure in the face of affected people seeing in resettlement an opportunity for progress and development defined in terms of western style innovation. Yet project planning and implementation is normally preoccupied with compensation and relocation to the detriment of planning productive activities and services to support them, and addressing this key social element.

Resettlement is inherently disruptive, and institutionalizing responses does not cater to the different needs of individuals. Often the national interest is overemphasized as against the local interest, and once the former is obtained the latter tends to be overlooked. So development planners must keep proper perspectives and consider also future unforeseen impacts. An understanding of local conditions and good data is essential for this. Good data on living standards linked to livelihoods of communities in particular are missing even though social baselines are established. As a result, in the great majority of projects it is impossible to determine whether living standards have been restored post project. This is a serious omission. It also deprives management of the information needed to take remedial measures.

The concept of programming resettlement in development program mode is gaining ground though practice is limited. Good practices in this respect are those that (i) focus on means of livelihood rather than on assets; (ii) assume an inclusive relationship between people and assets; and (iii) admit of a negotiated definition of just compensation. The record indicates that in those cases in which compensation packages were negotiated with project affected persons (PAPs) and other stakeholders, the process has resulted in better outcomes for the resettlement process as a whole. Even when, for whatever reason, the negotiated form of compensation proves not to be the most appropriate or effective option, PAPs tend to feel more satisfied, as a result of the negotiation process.

Successful resettlement with development is a fundamental commitment and responsibility of the state and the process must result in the creation of new rights that will render people direct beneficiaries of the development project. Resettlement need not necessarily result in impoverishment. It would not be accurate however to conclude without this final counsel that even in countries with best policy, institutional capacity and political commitment to do proper resettlement, there is an inverse relationship between scale of displacement and extent of achieving successful resettlement outcomes.