



Bridging the gaps in community and CSO participation and benefits sharing within NELSAP trans-boundary power projects.

Background

The NBI Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program (NELSAP) includes all NBI member countries except Ethiopia. It has a coordination unit based in Kigali, Rwanda which facilitates project processes in the region. NELSAP has within the Nile Basin Institutional Strengthening Programme (ISP) framework leveraged substantial investment funding to scale up its projects in Natural Resources Management, Hydropower Development and Power Trade.

NELSAP is implementing a Power program with the objective of creating a regional power market among NELSAP countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, DRC) through the development of transboundary power infrastructure and to establish rules and mechanisms for power exchange. The Project for the Interconnection of Electric Grids on Nile Equatorial Lakes Countries is aimed at strengthening and creating interconnected network among five NBI countries: Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and DRC. The project is managed through Project Coordination Unit within NELSAP and at national level the project is executed through the utilities responsible for the development of transmission lines, the one in Uganda being the Uganda Electricity Transmission Company Ltd (UETCL).

The Uganda components of the project are:

- The Uganda (Bujagali)- Kenya (Lessos) interconnection at 220kV
- The Uganda (Mbarara)- Rwanda (Mirama Hills-Kigali) interconnection at 220kV

Problem

Along these power lines, many people are affected by the implementation of these projects, both positively and negatively. People lose partially or totally their lands which leads to reduction of food production and lessens household income; community infrastructures (houses, school, offices, ...) are destroyed and family have to relocate their home or farms; while very low impact on livelihood of the affected community by the power trans-boundary projects. Despite the good planning and design oof the NBI transboundary power projects, the assumption is that due to the widespread of the geographic area of the projects and the complexity of the project environment, NELSAP and implementing utilities may lose the control on the community ownership and participation in the project implementation.

With reference to the recommendation from the Sub-regional Forum on Clean Energy held in Kigali on the 10th and 11th March 2011, Uganda Nile Discourse Forum (UNDF) organized a one-day National Stakeholders' Forum to discuss ways of enhancing participation by these affected local communities in the project processes; deliberate on mechanisms of enhancing benefits flow to the Nile Basin communities from the Project aiming to enrich NELSAP project processes and activities by the input of civil society for increased ownership. This included the identification of the key stakeholders of the Regional Power Interconnection Project and the best way to reach them, dialogue on the actual and potential positive and negative impact of the Regional Power Interconnection



Project on local communities and identifying strategies for NBD and NBI to promote stakeholder participation, protect and maximize social benefits from the regional power interconnection project.

The meeting was organized in Kampala on 28th April 2011. The forum was attended by project affected people, community representatives, Government and CSOs as well as NELSAP project staff.

Outcomes

The national forum organized by UNDF gave an opportunity for the government, NBD, NBI, the Private Sector, the media, the affected local communities, the civil society and the other important stakeholder groups in Uganda to interact and reflect on issues, challenges, and alternatives for enhancing the manner in which the NELSAP Regional Power Interconnection Project is implemented.

It was a first step to bring to the attention of NBI project managers the community concerns about unintended negative impact of the projects. UNDF was able to bring elderly to participate in the forum and express their concerns and satisfaction about NBI projects.

Issues on implementation and community consent were raised and one of the main achievement for UNDF has been enabling CSOs and participants to bring out the voice of the voiceless. For example, Mr. Tumwesigye Charles Kahiira and a number of other people like him in the affected communities had suffered in different ways from the impact of the project. Mr. Charles for example, whose land (6 acres) was purchased by UETCL in 2004 for construction of the Mirama Hills sub-station, along the Mbarara-Rwanda interconnection line. Mr. Tumwesigye would like to see UETCL change the project implementation plan in order to ensure that his household's livelihood source is not jeopardized. He said:



Mr. Tumwesigye addresses the forum about his land

“UETCL expressed interest in purchasing a piece of my land for the construction of an electricity station, which I agreed to. I was dully paid, after the land had been surveyed in 2004. But in 2007 the surveyors came when I was away, and went to my land, and demarcated the land without consulting me. When we were bargaining, I had indicated to them verbally that they would take land at the edge of my land, and not anywhere else. But for them, they just chose the area they thought was suitable for their purpose. They surveyed and fenced it off. When I came back, I was very unhappy because: 1) The land fenced off looked bigger than what I had agreed to sell to them; and, 2) The fenced off land was in the middle of my landholding. Since there is already another power line passing through my land, now the remaining land is totally broken into small pieces. So my humble request is: 1) That they allow me to resurvey the land to ascertain its size; and 2) that either they shift the station site to the edge of the land, or they should buy all my land and I find alternative land because the remaining land pieces are so disconnected and are making me fail as a livestock farmer”.

Mr. Tumwesigye was able to talk to Ms Grania Rosette Rubomboras and Ms. Wambua Mwikali, respectively, Regional Project Manager of the project and NELSAP Social Development Specialist who



informed him that resurveying the land to ascertain its size was alright. Ms Mwikali also promised to follow up his issue with UETCL.

The participants to the forum resolved to increase awareness on the processes and procedures of the project's Resettlement Action Plans so as to address issues relating to compensation, displacement, resettlement, valuation, infrastructure damage, costs of extension of power, project beneficiaries and generally issues of omission which need to be clarified for all stakeholders.

The NBI project implementers present demonstrated willingness to listen to the community concerns and promised to make efforts to further scrutinize and address them.



Ms. Abby Onencan, the NBD Regional Manager interacts with the NELSAP Social Development Specialist Ms Wambua Mwikali during the Forum



Ms. Grania Rubomboras (NELSAP Regional Project Manager) explains a point to Hon. MP Vincent Mujuni of Rwampara (one of the project-affected areas)

LESSONS LEARNT

This forum marked the beginning of UNDF's effort to influence the manner in which this NELSAP project is implemented on the ground. Since then UNDF continued this discussion, and we have made significant achievement in facilitating information exchange between the project implementers and the local leaders and project affected people. An assessment of the project impact on the ground was done along the proposed Bujagali-Tororo transmission corridor, and a follow-on forum was held in October 2011.

Public dialogue and national forum are particularly the best way of facilitating a very healthy information exchange between the project affected people from Eastern and Western Uganda and the Uganda Electricity Transmission Company Ltd (the Project Implementation Unit). The gap in limited information flow between the two parties was identified which is revealed as a serious bottleneck for the project implementation process.

However there is still a long way to go. Follow-up of the advocacy issues is slow, and there are delays in honoring commitments made by government bodies and NELSAP Project Implementation Units. For example, Mr. Tumwesigye has informed UNDF that he resurveyed the land and ascertained that it was the size that had been agreed on. However, he said that up to now (November 2011), no one has contacted him on the issue of relocating the station site or purchasing all his land. He says he is deeply troubled and his farming activities have been affected.