

Interviews with People to be Affected by Bui Dam: A Field Report

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This report is based on the findings from interviews I conducted at four villages affected by the Bui Dam Project, carried out in February 2008. These findings are in themselves shortened excerpts from my dissertation (available upon request), undertaken as part of the MSc course in Education for Sustainability at London South Bank University. In particular this report compares the findings from my interviews with the recommendations of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA), the Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) and the Resettlement Planning Framework (RPF), all submitted by Environmental Resources Management (ERM) in January 2007. Another relevant study that I include is Michael Fink's thesis on '*Integrating the World Commission on Dam Recommendations in Large Dam Planning Processes: the Case of the Bui Dam, Ghana*'.

I initially came across the Bui Dam during a visit to Ghana in July 2007. I, like many other tourists, had been attracted to Bui because of the chance to see hippos and the remarkable environment found in the Bui National Park. Whilst staying at Bui Camp I learnt of the proposed development of the dam and spoke to a health nurse who voiced her concerns regarding the health and economic problems that are a daily struggle for the local population. I continued to research the Bui Dam Project back in the UK before returning to Ghana in February 2008 to conduct the interviews. I have since stayed in contact with the local health nurse and support the local women's health project in the Bui area. They have run a programme of training nurses and educating new mothers in basic child care. I continue to help them and am keen to raise more funds to expand their services in light of growing needs because of the influx of dam workers.

Brief outline of the research methodology:

The interviews were conducted at four villages surrounding the Bui Dam site: Bui Camp, Bui Village, Bongase and Bator. Bui Village and Bator are to be resettled as they are located within the area that will be flooded for the reservoir. I conducted eight interviews at Bui Camp, had a focus group consisting of 15-20 people from Bui Village. I interviewed eight people from Bongase and had another focus group consisting of about four people at Bator. In some cases individual interviews turned into small focus groups as crowds tended to gather during the interview. At other times a focus group was arranged as the best means for the villagers to discuss their opinions between themselves before giving a response. In both the interviews and focus groups I tried to give as much opportunity as possible for the local people to express their own views as well as give accounts of personal experiences whilst raising any concerns that they had.

Owing to the social nature of this research the methods employed have been qualitative. In all cases every effort was made to take account of the cultural differences and respect the local customs in carrying out the interviews. I also acknowledge that the information presented

here is mediated by my own experiences. I have tried to remain as objective as possible and take into account as many different perspectives as possible.

The majority of interviews needed to be conducted through an interpreter who was also able to obtain verbal consent for those interviewees unable to read or write to sign the interview consent form. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Participation and consultation

- a) Section 13.1 of the RPF (p.113) cites the World Bank's requirements for Consultation and Participation from the World Bank Involuntary Resettlement Sourcebook.

In the Consultation Objectives of the RPF (section 13.2, p.111) the importance of community participation in the planning process is clearly stated:

'It will be important for all project affected people to participate throughout the various stages of the resettlement activities and the land acquisition process. They will need to be consulted by the competent authorities and will have to be invited to participate in public meetings held at appropriate stages of the resettlement process. These meetings will be an occasion to discuss resettlement issues and will provide a forum for stakeholders to express opinions and offer their suggestions.'

'Stakeholders should be publicly informed by the relevant authorities of the details of the resettlement activities. The information made public and provided to each household will include cut-off dates for each affected group (if the cut-off date differs), entitlements, eligibility criteria, modes of compensation, complaints and grievance redress procedures.'

However, none of the people I spoke to had any idea of when there were to be resettled, when they could expect compensation or how make their grievances known. Therefore the RPF objectives and information has obviously not reached the communities in the Bui area.

The general population had not been consulted about the dam construction or the resettlement process in any significant detail or to any meaningful degree. For example they were not given a time frame (such as the one outlined in the ESMP table 2.4) for the construction process, nor did they know when they are expected to leave their villages. The following extract from the focus group with the Bui Village shows the effect of the lack of information:

'Interpreter: ...with this construction of the dam they are doing the drilling and with this drilling there are blasting off the land and other things and here they don't know anything about it. Whatever they will come to do, they will come and do it. They are not informed about anything so they just heard about the blasting, blasting and this is affecting them as they are here.'

One farmer from Bui Village wanted to build a new house but was stopped by the authorities, presumably as the whole village is to be resettled in the near future. However, the bricks remained in a heap, clearly visible on entering Bui Village and the farmer cannot even continue with his plans in the new village. In effect the community are living with their lives on hold until they are resettled, which is a cause of much anxiety to them. Such anxiety could be easily allayed with the dissemination of information on the ESMP anticipated construction schedule.

This concurs with previous studies as Fink notes the lack of participation in the decision-making process. More worryingly, it seems the authorities in power are keen for this situation to remain. Fink's enquiries into why consultation was not more actively pursued produced the following comment from a planner:

"[S]ometimes the technical persons have to agree on a strategy first before involving everybody...if vital decisions are made for which we have not yet educated the people they should be excluded from the meeting." (Fink, 2005: 76)

In essence, this evidence suggests to me that consultation and participation has been kept to a minimal level so that construction can run as smoothly as possible. The people of Bui have been largely distanced from the planning process and disempowered in the development on which they are pinning their hopes for a better future.

Health concerns with the construction of the dam

The following is summarised from the ESIA, section 8.6, (pp.125-129):

- A permanent change in the water flows in the river and the creation of the reservoir will have a significant impact on the disease incidences in the local region, specifically communicable diseases such as bilharzia (increase), trypanosomiasis (increase), guinea and intestinal worms (increase), and onchocerciasis (decrease).
- Health impact from loss of medicinal plants.
- Increase in malnutrition
- Introduction of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS due to in-migration, poverty and prostitution.
- Possibility of those migrating to the area being in poor or unplanned housing which is likely to increase the spread of disease.

Temporary health impacts during the dam construction:

- Increased respiratory health incidence and eye infection
- Increased hearing impairment.
- Increased incidence of malaria
- Increased incidence of accidents
- Increase in traffic accidents

Whilst at Bui I learned that the health clinic is severely under-funded and under-resourced. One of their most urgent requirements is a vehicle in order to take patients to Wenchi in an emergency. Wenchi is the nearest big town with a hospital which is two hours away by car. The migrant dam workers I spoke to told me of an accident on the dam site where a Ghanaian worker was badly hurt by a falling pole and was not given any medical attention whatsoever. The increase in population and activity arising from the dam construction is undeniably going to put an increased strain on the local health resources. The Bui Health Clinic nurse told me that many of the Chinese workers had succumbed to malaria soon after they arrived. At the moment this already over-stretched clinic is attempting to treat all cases although there is already difficulty in reaching the local population who live in villages located further in the Bui National Park. Despite talks of extra health care funding and facilities nothing had materialised by the time of my field visit.

Compensation

An objective of the RPF is as follows:

‘To ensure that the Bui Dam project improves people’s economic opportunities and living conditions and minimises adverse impacts while also providing remedial measures for those adverse impacts that are unavoidable, particularly among the communities most directly affected by resettlement either through physical displacement or loss of economic resources.’
(RPF: p.i)

The issue of compensation was a specific worry to all the interview participants at Bui Village and Bator. The focus group conducted at Bui were especially worried since some had been to the resettled communities from the Akosombo dam construction heard their experiences of compensation not being forthcoming. Therefore the people from Bui Village desperately wanted legal representation and the compensation owed to be written down on legally binding documents. The extract below shows their fears:

‘Interpreter: They are also complaining of their farm land and if they come to measure it they do not tell them that maybe when they measure the farm land it was this, eight acres so when they come they can compensate you of the eight acres. They don’t tell them anything, no one ... they just take away, no one know about the acres of land they are taking away.’

None of the villagers knew how much they would receive in compensation or when it would be paid. Some of the fishermen from Bator told me that they had been given a date for the first instalment of their compensation. However this date had already passed and they had received nothing.

Future livelihoods

The RPF states that part of the BD objectives is to *‘ensure that livelihoods and standards of living are restored and where possible improved’* (Barrett, c: 14) but as yet future livelihoods are still very much an unknown quantity.

According to two skilled Ghanaian migrant workers I interviewed at Bui, the dam work will need skilled labourers. Since the local populations are mostly unskilled, they thought it was unlikely that the local people would be employed there; other interviewees suspected that local people would not be hired for much more than carrying water and stones around the dam site. A high rate of illiteracy means that it may be difficult for most locals to apply for jobs on the dam.

One of the interesting sections in the RPF was the following: *‘Education levels are very low, which could impact villagers’ ability to restore livelihoods if they need to adapt to changing livelihood opportunities.’* (Barrett, c: p.ii) The ESMP recommends capacity building, awareness raising and workshops (pp70-72) and it remains to be seen whether these recommendations are implemented as once again, there was no evidence of anything like this being implemented at the time of my field study.

There was one specific area of income which I thought was more viable to help the local community was brought to my attention by a group of women from Bongase village. They

were optimistic about that they would be able run stalls of food and water to supply to the dam workers and make a livelihood out of this.

Interpreter: *“They say people will be coming here to work as the government came to say they are employing 2,500 Ghanaian to come and work here. So they will be able to sell food like rice, they will be coming for food, they will be selling the yam and other things”*.
(Appendix C, xiv)

However, whilst I was there, the Chinese dam workers were operating from a self-contained complex and I never saw them in the villages. I therefore assume they get their food and water brought in from Wenchi direct. Another concern is that migrant populations also have the potential of bringing more social problems such as higher crime rates and sexually transmitted diseases.

Access to information and information dissemination

Section 3.1 of the RPF objectives includes the following:

‘Disclose the measures in the RPF to the local community prior to resettlement and conduct ongoing consultation with affected communities during the resettlement process and afterwards.’ (Barrett c, 14)

The importance of access to knowledge is significant since there is a concern that the people who will be most affected, or will suffer most, are those people who are least well informed.

Among the RPF objectives is to *‘disclose the measures in the RPF to the local community prior to resettlement and conduct ongoing consultation with affected communities during the resettlement process and afterwards.’* (Barrett, 2007 c: 14)

At the time of writing my enquiries made to ERM regarding where their reports were sent, whether they were translated and / or read to the local population and who was to follow up the consultation process have not been answered. ERM’s presence at Bui ended after May 2006, (apart from a visit made by Eamonn Barrett in August 2006) and their involvement with the whole project ended completely in January 2007.

All of the interviewees told me they heard information regarding the dam project through the radio. No one cited information from the Volta River Authority (VRA), the local authorities, their chiefs or the assemblyman. The dissemination of information from the authorities is apparently non-existent.

There are pictures of the dam and the Bui City on massive billboards on roads entering the Brong-Ahafo region, which was the only public information that I saw displayed regarding the Bui Dam or the Bui City. The assemblyman from Bongase was the only person I interviewed who had an idea where the Bui City would be located but even he did not know when it would be constructed. When much of the population are illiterate there is only a limited amount of information they can get from a billboard or poster.

Issues of environmental justice at Bui

In February 2008 much of the land surrounding the dam site, Bongase, and Bui Camp was completely scorched and many cashew trees were burnt. The reasons for this, I was told, were that the Chinese workers had burnt the trees.

“Interpreter: *They are talking about their cash crop that it all has been burnt and they said (...). They don't have anybody to consult and everything they are saying is verbal nothing is written on paper. So they fear they will not be compensated.*”

They were told to go to their government if they were unhappy as the Chinese workers had the full backing of the Ghanaian authorities to clear this land. . Mr. Baffour Awuah (the regional minister) has ‘urged the local people who have been employed by the Chinese Contractors to dialogue on issues for effective resolutions instead of hostilities’ (Boateng, 2008) however in this case there was obviously no dialogue whatsoever between the Chinese dam construction workers and the farmers. The farmers, understandably, feel aggrieved but know there is nothing they can do. Not only are the farmers from Bui Village currently deprived of their livelihood (cashew farming), but the uncertainties surrounding the resettlement, compensation and timetable of events also caused much anxiety. These are issues of environmental justice as people who once depended on the land are now facing resettlement without information about their future means of income generation. Therefore, one of the most pressing issues the Bui Village focus group wanted resolved was to have documentation of their current assets and a legally binding form to say what compensation they are owed. At the time of conducting the interviews for this research they had no such documentation nor were they aware of available legal backing. The following is the legal framework section (RPF: p.iii) which identifies the following gaps:

- ‘(a) lack of clearly defined eligibility requirements;*
- (b) no clear treatment of irregular occupants or users;*
- (c) no clear requirement for supplemental assistance to vulnerable individuals and groups;*
- (d) no public participation required for land acquisition process;*
- (e) the basis for evaluation of land, houses, and structures needs more clarity;*
- (f) no community and traditional dispute settlement mechanisms exist for the land acquisition and resettlement process. Land tribunals have not been functional. Recourse to the High Court is not speedy or cost-effective for most claimants;*
- (g) no clear provisions exist in terms of when cash payment is appropriate and when in-kind compensation is preferred. Also no clear guidelines of timing, location etc;’*

From the information given in the interviews, I saw no evidence that these had been addressed.

More recent developments at Bui:

- 1) Appeal by Chiefs and people of Jama for representation in the Bui Dam Development Planning (reported in www.modernghana.com)
- 2) A new body will be set up to ensure the improvement in the quality of life of the people in the Bui Dam Project. *‘The new body is to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce environmental problems that will arise with the creation of the new hydro project. It will also evolve strategic programmes that will maximize economic activity in the area.’* (reported in <http://gbcghana.com/news/19290detail.html>)
- 3) ‘Osahene Kwaku Aterkyi, who is a member of the Bui Secretariat, said sectional areas for the detailing on the land acquired, would be made available and published after

the signing of the documents covering the acquired lands, for Traditional Authorities and Individual Landowners to clearly make out the boundaries of the affected lands to claim compensations. He called on the Chiefs and the people of the area to exercise patience till the completion of the necessary documentations, since government would ensure that none of the affected persons suffers. The Brong-Ahafo Regional Minister, Ignatius Baffour Awuah, who was part of the delegation, noted that there would be sorts of misunderstanding erupting as the project commence[d] , but since the project was of great importance to the country at large it needs the collaboration and support of every Ghanaian. He appealed the Bui Secretariat to seriously look at speculative projects to avoid over spending on compensations. The regional minister suggested that since the Bui secretariat is in Accra, a district secretariat could be established to facilitate the administrative process.’ (quoted from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200803260880.html>)

In regards to the first two points I understood the RPF as already having recommended such initiatives. The third report is more concerning in regards to the appeal for any ‘mis-understanding’ to be excused for the benefits of the national interest. It depends what constitutes a ‘misunderstanding’ but if it is that the government are not fulfilling their promises (in regards to compensation for example) or not adhering to the recommendations of the ERM documents then the local people are being asked to sacrifice their land, homes and individual welfare for somebody else’s benefit, without complaints. As far as ‘over spending’ on compensation goes, (although it is unlikely given past experience from the Akosombo dam resettlement), it would no doubt set a welcome precedent for local people.

Conclusion:

I have not included recommendations in this report since they would repeat what has already been written in the ESIA, ESMP, RPF and Michael Fink’s thesis on integrating the WCD’s recommendations at Bui. However, why these recommendations have not been implemented requires further investigation. Also, I have not yet found any of the ERM documents to make reference to the Chinese company, Sinohydro, as stakeholders in the project. There is little documentation about their practices and specific involvement at Bui that I have come across. Issues such as health care on the construction site and health care for the Chinese workers have not seemed to be put in place by any organisation at this stage.

From my interviews I can identify two key concerns for the local inhabitants:

- 1) Legal documentation of all compensation promises and information about the dam building and resettlement schedule.
- 2) Education, adequate health care and food shortages are also high priorities. Funding is desperately needed in all of these areas.

In the case of the Bui Dam, the outcome of industrial development for the local people’s future livelihoods is still very much an unknown quantity. On the whole the local population is not against the Bui Dam project. In my opinion, the authorities risk losing the valuable support of the local population if they do not alter their exclusive practices and recognise the local people as major stakeholders in the development process.

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