

**<Field Note>**  
**Interview at Affected Village in February 2015**  
**Regarding Asset Survey Held on Lower Sesan 2 Dam**

**15 June 2015**  
**Mekong Watch**

**Background**

The asset measurement survey for compensation on Lower Sesan 2 (LS2) Hydropower dam began in late 2014.

LS2 is being developed by a joint venture of Cambodia's Royal Group, China's Hydrolancang International Energy, and Vietnam's Vietnam Electricity. It is located 1.5 km below the confluence of the Sesan and Srepok Rivers in Stung Treng Province of Cambodia. The project was approved by Cambodia's cabinet in November 2012 and is now under construction, despite the failure of its decision-making process to meet international best practices.

Approximately 5,000 people, mostly from indigenous and ethnic minority groups, are faced with resettlement. Many villagers have been refusing resettlement and are requesting proper consultation with the developers, because the policy on compensation for the impacts of LS2 was released unilaterally by the developers in January 2014. A local authority was told by a company representative that villagers had to resettle in 2015, however the resettlement plan was not shared with all of those who are to be resettled.

According to the affected villagers, the first measurement survey was conducted in Chrob Village in November 2014, and the survey has been conducted in the other affected villages thereafter.

In February 2015, we visited Kbal Romeas Village, one of the affected villages located along the Srepok River. Most of inhabitants in this village are of the indigenous Punong ethnic minority. This village is voicing their opposition to the dam's construction, and so far there are no agreements between the developers and the residents. However, we heard that asset survey has started and were anxious about the current situation given true feelings of the villagers regarding the survey and dam construction.



As soon as we entered the village, we saw red signs on houses and could tell that something has happened, so we asked one young villager what had happened. He told us that asset surveys were conducted, and the signs meant those houses had already been measured.

According to him, the group, along with the provincial and district governors, came to Kbal Romeas Village on the 14th of December and informed the villagers that the asset survey would start soon. The surveys were then conducted from the 15th to the 19th. Now the houses and trees that have been measured are marked with "LSS2" and some numbers in red spray paint. He said, "They sprayed the name

LS2 in English on the houses after the measurement. I don't know the meaning of the other numbers. Some houses without signs are not yet measured because they did not allow the survey group to measure."

### **The thumbprint does not mean accepting resettlement.**

The villager explained the measurement process in detail. "When the survey group came, they did not explain or show anything to us. They just asked the house owners or their families the area of their house and how many mango trees or coconut trees they had, and recorded the data. They also asked whether they want a concrete or wooden house. Some answered they wanted money to construct houses by themselves. They sprayed on the house and trees for which they will pay compensation. After that, they asked both husband and wife to place their thumbprints. Then they took photos of family and their house."



He continued and shared with us why the families had their houses measured. "Some families who had their house measured understood the meaning of the measurement, but some did not understand clearly. They were afraid of being flooded by the dam, so they just followed those who allowed their house to be measured. Some said they did not want to move out but they had no choice. They did not want to have their house measured, but they were persuaded by the measuring group, who were accompanied by the police."

During our visit, we met some villagers who regretted agreeing by giving their thumbprints. Some also doubted if the developers will compensate them properly because they already informed villagers that housing land size they would offer will be smaller than the ones indicated in the compensation policy. A villager in her 30s said, "I wonder why other villagers believe they will get compensation. The company can give us less than they promise. I cannot trust them."

### **The survey group did not share the measurement results.**

No copies of the documentation was given to the house owners who had their house measured. Moreover, they did not allow villagers to read the document. The young villager said, "They took all the documents with them. When they asked house owners to place thumbprints, the house owners were able to see only some parts of the document. They did not see the title. The survey group came to conduct the measurement for LS2, and the project will affect the villagers, but they did not explain anything about the document. Some villagers were not clear about the measurement and the documentation. But they saw other families placing their thumbprints, and then followed them."

### **Pressures and threats are happening.**

The young villager also shared pressures and threats that happened before and after the measurement. "The village authorities told villagers to agree to have their house measured. They said that villagers should not protest against the Royal Government and since they were ordinary people, they have to respect higher ranking people. During the measurement, villagers felt pressure from the police who

accompanied the surveyors. There were at least two policemen from the district. Even so, some families refused to let their house be measured. After the measurement, the survey group, the provincial and district governors, and also the company representative said to them ‘when inundation occurs, we will not be responsible for that.’ I also heard some threatening words that the family whose house had not been measured would be hung upside down.”

The villager in her 30s shared her case. “People complain to me about why I oppose LS2. They say I shouldn’t because my family member is a government worker. We were threatened not to be paid salary if we oppose LS2. Even some relatives blame us and say we are stupid for not accepting money. This compensation issue is breaking up relationships among relatives.”

**There are families that refused to be measured and they are saying that they will devote their lives to protect their village.**

The young villager said, “The families who refused to accept the measurement were not afraid of the threats. They believe that even though they are only ordinary people, if the government does the right thing, they will follow. But if not, they will not agree and have to protest. They would die for their village. They do not want to move away from the village. The new place is not the same as this village. This village is very easy for the villagers to live in. They have easy access to the river, lakes or ponds. There are places for cattle herding. The authorities said that in the new place, villagers need to have money for food, but people do not know how to earn money. So they cannot move there. They are willing to die and are devoted to living their lives here.”

Villagers in Kbal Romeas have been living, worshipping spirits, and relying on natural resources such as the rivers and forests around them. Moving to another place and losing access to these natural resources mean they will lose their indigenous traditions and cultures as well as their livelihoods. Another villager in her 30s said, “If we don’t have food, we just go to the river for fish to feed our family. We are very happy to live here. We have everything here. We do not want to move anywhere else, no matter how good or bad this place is. We also promised our ancestors and spirits that we would live and raise our children here. We cannot betray them.”

The young villager also said, “As a Punong citizen, I would like to make a request to the Royal Government and the owner of the Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Project to please terminate the construction and consider the impacts on the people like us who live in the inundation area. We worry so much. We cannot sleep well or go anywhere because of the dam construction. We are so devoted to the place we are born. We will commit ourselves to express our disagreement even though the Royal Government still continues the project, and they arrest us or whatsoever. We are not afraid and we are committed to continue living in this village.”

These were the voices we heard upon our visit to the village in February.

END