



INTERNATIONAL
ACCOUNTABILITYPROJECT

Preliminary Findings from Community-led Research on the Northern Province Sustainable Fisheries Development Project, Sri Lanka

October 2018

Introduction

“We are unable to understand the negative and positive impact[s] of this project. The project should create awareness [in the] community. Consult the community before planning and identify the community needs with the community.”

-Survey respondent, Mannar community, Sri Lanka

With support from the Sri Lanka Nature Group (“SLNG”) and the International Accountability (“IAP”), communities in Mannar district in the Northern province of Sri Lanka recently conducted community-led research on the Northern Province Sustainable Fisheries Development Project, a project proposed by the Asian Development Bank (“ADB”). The objective of the research, which was carried out between June and September 2018, was to study affected communities’ access to information. A community-based survey assessed community members level of awareness about the project; access to information; opportunities for public participation and consultation; the perceived human rights and environmental risks associated with the project; and the degree to which the project incorporated any community-led development priorities.

On 4 May 2018,, SLNG met with the Office of the US Executive Director in ADB Headquarters in Manila, Philippines to raise the initial concerns of the fisherfolk communities. A meeting was also held in Jaffna, Sri Lanka on 10 June 2018 together with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource, ADB’s Resident Mission and with an estimate of 27 community members to discuss further the said proposed Project. The community was under the impression that the proposed Project would not be approved not until March 2019 and further consultations have taken place.

The following document provides preliminary findings from the community-led research process, as well as a summary of community asks. A full report is forthcoming.

Investment Description and Background

The Northern Province of Sri Lanka has experienced severe conflict over the past 30 years, with nearly 100% of the population being internally displaced throughout the civil war. This is the first major infrastructure and livelihood project in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka since the 1983 - 2009 civil war. The communities are still actively rebuilding and restoring the trust needed for long-term peace and prosperity.

The ADB is presently considering financing a \$158 to \$174 million USD loan for the **Northern Province Sustainable Fisheries Development Project** (49325-002) (the "Project"), which will develop two fishery harbors, rehabilitate related infrastructures, and develop aquaculture in Jaffna, Mannar, Multhive, Kilinochchi in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. These are areas where local communities subsist on traditional fishing activities, such as offshore fishing, Viduvallai fishing, Paychchuvallai fishing and Rafter fishing. According to available project documents, the ADB has assigned the following risk categories to this project: environment (category B); involuntary resettlement (category B); and indigenous peoples (category C). The ADB previously assisted Sri Lanka's Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development and Rural Economic Affairs on a Project Design Advance (49325-003).

According to local communities, the proposed Project activities are not based on local fisher communities' requests and have been designed without the meaningful consultation with communities. Civil society organization SLNG has been in contact with communities to raise awareness and discuss concerns about the project the fisheries cooperatives and federations and found that affected communities lack materials in the local Tamil and Sinhala languages, and have very little information and understanding about the Project.

Local communities have reported instances of intimidation and coercion from project management, government and ADB consultants in the Northern Province. These concerns have been consistently communicated and discussed with local project management and ADB staff in Sri Lanka.

Finally, we note that, on 6 September 2018, the Pesalai Fisherman Co-op Society filed a complaint in relation to the Project to the ADB Accountability Mechanism, disputing the proposed large-scale fishing harbor is inconsistent with local community development priorities that have advocated for 15 years to construct a small-scale breakwater wall, in addition to negative impacts on traditional fishing livelihoods and environmental contamination from wastage oil and fuel. There are also reports of construction bids already being awarded prior to loan approval. That complaint is pending eligibility and resolution.

The Project disclosure page is available at: <https://www.adb.org/projects/49325-002/main>.

The complaint to the ADB Accountability Mechanism (No. 105) is registered on the Complaint Receiving Officer's Complaints Registry, available at: <https://www.adb.org/site/accountability-mechanism/complaints-receiving-officer/complaints-registry>.

About the Community-Led Research

In March 2018, civil society groups SLNG, IAP, and Accountability Counsel were invited by affected communities from Project-affected communities in Mannar, Multhive, and Jaffna to exchange information about the Project and applicable ADB safeguard policies and processes. Following that meeting, the affected communities requested support from civil society groups to conduct community-led research. The community-led research process was initiated in June 2018, and it concluded in September 2018.

The community-led research was structured in the form of individual interviews, four focus group discussions, and community discussions. The individual interview process included survey results from 400 community members of Mannar District (342 men and 58 women) who were to be impacted by the Project. In addition, four focus group discussions were conducted, involving 19 women and 25 men. Respondents reported being of Tamil ethnicity, ranging in age from 20-80 years old, with 63% of respondents being between ages 36-55. Most of the respondents identified as being part of the small scale fisherfolk community.

Subsequent steps in the community-led research process will include additional visits to the communities in Mannar District to discuss the findings and share updated information about the Project.

Community-Led Research Preliminary Findings

Unless otherwise noted, the following preliminary findings are based on the individual surveys. A full report, with more detailed findings, is forthcoming.

Access to Project Information

92% of respondents did not know who was funding the Project.

88% of respondents did not know who was implementing the Project.

93% of respondents reported that they did not receive information for the office contacts or names of those involved in implementing the project.

98% of respondents reported that they did not receive information about either the consultation or project complaint processes.

99% of respondents reported that they did not receive information about the compensation process.

94% of respondents reported that they do not have the information needed to be able to provide

informed opinions and ideas about the project plans.

87% of respondents did not know who would benefit from this project.

99% of respondents reported they do not know how to obtain project information.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Excerpt testimony from survey respondents on their access to information

“They were not telling us anything about the purpose of the project.”

“The project information should be provided to everyone in our local language.”

“We were not given any awareness of the project. Please provide awareness and discuss with community.”

Community Participation and Consultation

99% of respondents indicated that they were not consulted during project planning.

91% of respondents reported that they have not participated in any activities conducted by the project financier or executing agencies to measure and document the value of their homes, land and resources that would be affected by the Project.

96.6% of respondents reported they did not have any an opportunity to propose ideas for specific development projects for their community. Only **0.3%** responded that their idea was incorporated into the project plans.

52% disagreed with the whole project and wanted to propose changes to the project plans. Also, **24%** agreed with the overall project, but wanted to proposed changes to the project plans.

Several respondents raised concerns regarding intimidation in the process. One respondent suggested that the project should not appoint a “senior retired government officers as a [project] consultant.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Excerpt testimony from survey respondents on the process of meaningful consultation and concerns about coercion

“Consult the community before commencing a project.”

“Respect the community by planning [the project] with the community.”

“Directly discuss and plan with community participation, based on their needs.”

“They will threaten us with force and violence to scare us to move.”

Environmental and Social Risks and Concerns

Based on the focus group discussions, the local fisherfolks cooperative society appear to be strongly committed to improving their communities’ livelihoods, as well as protecting the marine resources. Participants also expressed concerns about outsiders primarily benefiting from the harbor, if built. There were many questions and concerns raised regarding the management of the services and activities related to the Project, including the harbors, anchorages, landing sites, filling stations, and cooling facilities. Questions and concerns, involving environmental and social risks, are aggravated by a lack of information in Tamil and Sinhala local languages, despite assurances to provide appropriate translation and interpretation. These have the real potential to destabilize a rebuilding community, creating unnecessary conflict between fisherfolks and their families, outside groups and the project.

95% of the respondents reported concerns that their source of livelihoods will be destroyed as a result of the Project.

91% of respondents reported concerns about loss of access to services as a result of being displaced.

95% of respondents stated that their idea of development is different from their government's idea of development.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Excerpt testimony from survey respondents on environmental and social risks and concerns

“Any project implemented in our area should benefit our community without destroying the environment and our livelihoods.”

“Plan the project without harming the environment or our livelihood.”

“My source of livelihood will be destroyed. We will have to move because we have no option.”

Community Asks

1. The ADB Board of Directors should postpone the vote on the project until the communities who have expressed concerns about a lack of information sharing have received adequate information and been properly consulted by project officers and the executing agencies.
2. The ADB and executing agencies should ensure the meaningful consultation of community members, youth, and fisherfolk cooperative representatives throughout each stage of the project, especially in the planning process. The project should enable and facilitate the ownership and management of project activities by affected communities, diversify fisheries activities, and build the knowledge and skills required by local community for sustainable fisheries.
3. ADB should ensure the implementation of its social and environmental safeguard to provide timely, accessible information about the Project, the applicable ADB safeguards and accountability mechanism in a language and by a means that the community can understand. Information should be provided as early as possible in the project cycle. The project documents available now on the ADB website are only available in English. Project documents in Tamil should be provided to affected communities.
4. The ADB and executing agencies should take into account the concerns, recommendations and demands by local communities and incorporate community development priorities into project plans before the project is approved.
5. The ADB and government of Sri Lanka should ensure a safe space for people to meaningfully participate throughout the process. This space should be free from any form of intimidation or coercion.

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