Eliminating states of conflict by pro-active planning

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Abstract

This study examines the prospects of introducing new methodologies in conducting a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for a particular project where conflicts have or would have aroused due to insufficient SIA planning methodology leading to the failure or alteration of the project. A case study of Koto Hydropower Project (31 MW, at Panjkora River, District Lower Dir) in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan shows the resistance by the villagers towards saving their agricultural land, plus lack of faith on resettlement issues, led to a conflict and thus altered the project location and design. The resistance was so extreme that the decision makers had to choose an alternate project location. Moreover, the basic economic activity of villagers was on agricultural land or daily labourer wages since no industrial setup exists. These kinds of issues can be resolved by a pro-active SIA approach and decision making in which pre-SIA preparations and post-SIA approaches are explained which could minimize or rather mitigate the conflicts.

Background:

The Koto HPP is a run-of-river scheme, about 5 Km upstream from Timergara on Panjkora River, District Lower Dir, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. The proposed weir site is now located near Rani Village on the Panjkora River. The power house is located near Koto Village. Koto HPP is part of the Three Hydropower Plant Project in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa implemented by Sarhad Hydel Development Organization (SHYDO) and funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB) after identification of potential hydropower generation sites in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa by SHYDO and Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technique Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

Three alternate sites namely site A, B and C were marked by the decision makers but the site selected for this project was Site A, which covers the village named Munjai since this provides the shortest length of power channel towards the power house. The feasibility studies, including socio-economic survey were then started for the Site A (Munjai village), which revealed that total population of the project area was 22,411 in which 49% belong to male gender, project area landholdings consist of 40.7% cultivable land, 4.25% grazing land, 16.9% waste land and 5.9% mountain land. 32.2% of land out of cultivable area was cropped. The literacy rate of above 10 year plus population was 28.2 %. Out of total 2493 houses/structures 91.21% were Pacca, while 2.40 % and 6.37 % houses were semi Pacca and Kacha respectively. 45.72 % houses had potable water supply and 97 % houses were electrified. People mainly depend on agriculture and some do laboring work for earnings an income (socio-economic survey Nov 2009).

A conflict arose during the consultative meetings in relation to the socio-economic surveys. People strongly opposed to any intention of having a Hydropower project by losing their agricultural lands and livelihood. Most of them showed a lack of faith in resettlement criteria. The people completely renounced any construction of a dam in their area, rather they were angry enough that they destroyed the geotechnical survey instruments used for feasibility studies at the site. Thus the overall project fell into decline, forcing decision makers to consider other alternatives to the project.

The above case study shows that there are some loop holes in the overall planning and execution of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) procedures. It can be concluded that if the proper SIA preparations are made or the scope of SIA was designed in such a manner to meet the maximum targets of the proposed activity. There are two main approaches/methodologies proposed that should be adopted before or after having a social conflict situation in any proposed project which can alter or even change the direction of conflict to an acceptable level or rather diminish the social conflict. This paper will discuss the methodologies of SIA in two phases i.e; pre-SIA preparations and post-SIA approach.

At first we should conclude the causes of conflict in the above mentioned case study, which are mentioned as:

Social Conflict Causes:

According to the above situation, the following reasons can be noted which might be the cause of social conflict:

1. Loss of valuable agricultural land
2. Lack of faith in the resettlement criteria
3. No other option for economic activities
4. No proper orientation towards prospects of hydropower plant
5. Not accepting any social sacrifice or external intrusion.

Above mentioned attributes can be referred to as the basic cause of social conflict since this village was the only one possessing greater agricultural lands in that area and villagers strongly disagreed about any kind of loss to their land and property even when they were told about the compensation amount.

Methodology

SIA can be divided into two phases, namely:

1. Pre-SIA preparations
2. Post SIA approach

Pre-SIA Preparations include the planning and methodologies to be adopted according to the social status of that area.

Post SIA approach would consist of eliminating or minimizing the causes of social conflict that have been aroused.

Results and Discussion

The above scenario indicates that the locals have strong dependence on their agricultural lands plus they do not agree on the compensation being offered to them since they have written less amount of land purchased on the papers to avoid taxes and the government offers compensation with respect to the amount written on papers of land which eventually becomes less than the actual value. Hence, as a result of this, their compensation amount gets less than the currently prevailing land rates.

Before doing the social surveys or telling the locals about the project, there should be some preliminary surveys or workshops/sessions concentrating on the needs and problems of that area. Also, it can be proposed that pre-SIA preparations can be done before startup of the feasibility study of a particular project, in order to evaluate the existing circumstances and correlating it with the proposed project (in the decision making phase). It is proposed that a specific amount from the project budget should be allocated to perform these tasks. It would include steps as follows:

1. **Pre-SIA preparations**
    - Determining the basic needs of project area *(electricity, economy, education, agriculture, natural gas, transport etc)*
    - Assessing the economic potential of the area *(natural resources that can support the economy)*
    - Evaluating sources of income generation activities in project area *(types of activities that can be done to generate income for the area)*
    - Educating the locals about the current problems of their area *(in schools, colleges, workshops, conferences and meetings with locals)*
    - Orientation towards the “Need” of the project *(not mentioning the proposed project, just elaborating the needs of the area and locals and setting up their minds towards the possibility of the proposed project)*
    - Addressing the potential natural hazards that could originate *(should mention the natural hazards like flood, earthquake, drought etc that could come in future years so that*

people should think of getting an advantage from the project and/or either agree on development of the project)

- Focusing on the benefits that might be availed through the particular project specially economic related *(elaborating with examples the prospects of proposed project)*
- Enhancing the social discipline, social harmony and social attitudes of people *(organizing workshops/sessions or festivals to introduce the best practices)*
- Turning their minds towards improving lifestyle and living status *(narrating examples of developed countries/cities/areas)*
- Grooming their thinking of sacrificing for the country *(introducing patriotism through workshops/seminars)*
- Religious citations *(religious scholars can be engaged to help in mobilization of pre-SIA activities)*

When the social conflict has aroused and locals are not accepting any intervention of a project, then such approaches can be applied which could divert the attention of the locals to other prospects, creating a gap between the stringent conditions to invite acceptance. This can be described as a Post-SIA Approach, and is explained as:

2. Post SIA approach

- Devising ways to common interest *(can be in terms of agricultural production, effective resettlement plan, electricity, transportation etc)*
- Devising new ways to give monetary benefits to the locals *(starting any local funding opportunities, installing any commercial or industrial setups, giving shares in construction activities etc)*
- Having an effective and result oriented resettlement plan *(it should be made more effective or revised subsequently after the social demands and scenario)*
- Compensation of land and houses should meet demands of locals *(project amount may cover all the compensation amount of affected land and houses, locals may be given an extra subsidy to divert their thinking towards giving up)*
- Introducing new income generating facilities *(should install small household industrial units, commercial market, financing schemes etc)*
- Educating the people *(programs should be launched in schools, colleges, religious gatherings etc to motivate and educate people about the need of project through different success stories and case studies)*

- Elaborating on the benefits of the project (*while conducting meetings/ sessions/ workshops with the locals, benefits of the project should be highlighted extraordinarily)*
- Addressing the potential natural hazards that could originate *(should warn people about natural hazards like floods, earthquake, drought etc that could come in future years so that people should agree on development of project)*
- Introducing the best practices of socialism *(though education, people should be introduced social harmony, social best practices to have a polite way of thinking and admitting the need of project)*
- Introducing the sacrificial approach towards the betterment of society and country *(ways of patriotic sacrifices should be introduced to convince people about sacrificing for the noble cause)*

Conclusion

The most important part of this study is to "take a step before planning". This means that before concluding the decisions to any particular project site, the environmental, social and economic profile of the project area should be studied deeply and a pre-SIA should be conducted to know the views and demands of locals. It can be a long procedure towards the execution of a project, but surely a planned procedure, in which social conflicts would not arise. It is seen through surveys and maps that the most appropriate site was site C, because it involves less environmental and social cost since it includes minimum removal of agricultural and residential land plus its reservoir area is less as compared to Site A. The decision makers chose the wrong site initially without evaluating the social and environmental status of the project site, which led to a conflict and, at the end, decision makers have to re-consider an alternate site.

But if it was deemed necessary to continue the project on Site A, if some of the tools of pre-SIA or either post-SIA would have been applied, then there was likely to have been no social conflict. For example, the place was deprived of any economic generation activity except agricultural dependence. Also, people had much less faith in the compensation amount being offered by government, plus there was much less knowledge of prospects of a hydropower project and the attitudes of villagers were aggressive.

Hence, if people had been offered alternative income generation activities such as small industrial/commercial units, provided with crops which they could cultivate, had received an extra compensation amount, had an agreed resettlement plan, received education about the prospects of a hydropower project and have had proper orientation/education regarding the project and social behaviors, then this could definitely have been a success story of SIA. As is seen in one of the hydropower projects, the Mangla Dam Raising Project in Pakistan, which includes the compensation/resettlement cost to 2/3rd of the total budget of the project, which comes out to be a success story in terms of social impact assessment.

Another important point to mention here is that after conflict arose and planners had to re-think alternate sites, the flood of 2010 washed away all the agricultural land about which the villagers were quarreling. So, at the end, the villagers did not availed the compensation and also lost their agricultural lands. It is seen through surveys that people lost about 30 to 40% of their valuable agricultural land because of the flood of 2010.

Hence, by adopting the Pre-SIA and Post-SIA approaches it can be concluded that most of the minor and major issues can be resolved by proper methodology and/or planning of any proposed project.