

Use of Development Communication in mitigating negative social, economic and environmental effects caused by Deduru Oya Reservoir Project in Kurunegala District

Madhubhashini R. Rathnayaka^{1*}, W. Indralal De Silva²

¹*Save the Children, Sri Lanka*

²*Department of Demography, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

Specific use of communication in development is identified as 'Communication for Development' or 'Development Communication.' Proper flow of information and in return proper participatory communication among the stakeholders are essential in development projects. Sensitivity to social, economic and environmental effects caused by a development project and mutual understanding among the stakeholders to mitigate those is important for the sustainability of development projects. As evidenced by the 'Environmental impact assessment report' of DeduruOya Reservoir Project (DORP) in Kurunegala, North Western Province in Sri Lanka, miscommunication about the project has been a crucial issue affecting the people in the area. The objective of this research is to evaluate the use of Development Communication to mitigate negative social, economic and environmental effects caused by DORP which is Sri Lanka's 6th largest reservoir implemented by the Irrigation Department. Improvement of livelihoods of farmers in a part of the North Western Province, and enhancement of reliable sources for domestic and industrial water supply schemes and control of downstream floods are the aims of this project.

This is an ongoing research. A few interviews conducted so far have identified the issues such as people's ignorance of key information of the project and the issues caused by resettlement which have not been heard well by the decision makers or those with political influence. Collection of information via a household survey, in-depth interviews and observations are yet to be completed. The research will identify the negative social, economic and environmental effects caused by implementation of DORP and how the stakeholders used the Development Communication process during planning, implementation and maintenance of project to mitigate social, economic and environmental effects. This research also will identify the effectiveness and also the drawbacks of the use of Development Communication in the above mentioned processes. In Sri Lanka, wide application of Development Communication in planning, implementation and maintenance of development projects is not popular, though the other Asian countries such as Philippines practice it. This affects the sustainability of development projects. Thus, with the conclusion of the research, a contextualized Development Communication model will be developed and introduced, which can be used in development projects.

Keywords: Development communication, Participatory communication, Stakeholders