
Malaysia: why the Selangor Dam?

The Selangor dam project is being strongly resisted by local communities, indigenous peoples and environmental NGOs, since it means the destruction of 600 hectares of rainforest, the eviction of the native Temuan from their ancestral homelands, and the destruction of the green sanctuary of Pertak in Ulu Selangor. It is also feared that the wetlands near Kuala Selangor, as well as the montane forest of Pertak will be adversely affected. Additionally, safety matters regarding the dam structure have not been adequately addressed. With well founded arguments the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) has severely questioned the Environmental Impact Assessment study (EIA) prepared by SMHB Sdn. Bhd for the project proponent, Konsortium TSWA-Gamuda-KDEB (see WRM Bulletin 22).

The opposition to the project is increasing. SOS Selangor (Save Sungai Selangor), a group of concerned citizens whose aim is to protect the environment in the region, has denounced that the EIA contract was given to a component of the consortium involved in the building of the dam, without an open competitive tender. This document contradicts itself in a number of topics and does not even follow the guidelines set by the Department of the Environment (DOE) on information that the assessment should contain. Considering that the EIA has been conditionally accepted by the environmental authority, SOS Selangor is claiming that the conditions placed on the dam consortium as a result of the EIA are made public. This means that the DOE must ensure that the monitoring and enforcement of the project is completely credible by informing about important issues related to it, for example how many qualified personnel will be dispatched to the site, how the environmental authority is going to enforce the EIA conditions that logging must be confined within the 600 hectare reservoir area, if this area will be thoroughly cleared before flooding, if wildlife must be given adequate berth to escape from the area before flooding, etc. According to precedents that have ended in environmental disaster, monitoring and enforcement of EIA conditions by the DOE and municipal authorities do not really take place in Malaysia.

As an immediate measure, SOS Selangor is demanding that the illegal logging activities performed by Gamuda in the catchment area of the Selangor River be immediately stopped, since no permits or contracts have yet been signed. In the meantime, a capital question remains with no answer: why going ahead with the Selangor dam project in a country where three dam projects - Bakun, Sabah and Kelantan- have recently failed, and where forests are quickly being destroyed?

Sources: SOS Selangor, 14/12/99;