Rural Ethnic Women’s participation in decision making on development projects

View and Perspectives
Draft

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Laws and Policies

- One of the top priority areas of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2011): “to ensure women’s equal participation in decision making and leadership at all levels of society.”

- 2016 Land Use Policy guarantees women’s participation in decision making process related to land tenure right and management issues

- 2015 Myanmar Environmental Impact Assessment Procedure (EIA) require project developers to adhere to international best practices such as IFC performance standard 7 on protection of Indigenous/Ethnic Peoples rights from the activities of businesses, Gender is a cross-cutting issue

- Article 5 of the 2015 Ethnic Rights Protection Law thinly includes the Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC) concept relating to any projects including extracting natural resources from ethnic areas
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Approaches, practices in the past

- Project developers acquire permit or license without proper and meaningful consultations with the affected community and stakeholders concerned, including vulnerable groups such as women.

- EIA was not a requirement and land acquisition were done without proper resettlement policy framework or plan.

- Rural ethnic women’s participation in decision making over development projects was never considered.

- In the past, monitoring project impacts and sharing benefits of the project with the local community was never considered as a requirement for doing good business.
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Approaches in present time

- EIA was enacted in 2015 and currently drafting public participation guideline on EIA with gender inclusivity.

- No legal framework on resettlement policy and plan yet, but indicates to adopt international best practices in the EIA procedure.

- Currently Strategic Environmental Assessment, SEA is being carried out on hydropower sector and gender is a cross-cutting issue.

- Government pressure on companies to do community investment programmes without meaningful community participation (2% of profit spending over CSR program).
Lessons Learned

- Rural ethnic women’s participation in making decisions over development projects that have an impact on their lives is restricted due to institutional, traditional, and social barriers.

- As a result, rural ethnic women’s voices are not heard and do not enjoy benefits from development projects, but tend to be impacted negatively more than men (e.g., hydropower dam projects).

- Without participation of the community, especially women, 2% CSR spending program developed by companies are not meaningful and effective and sustainable.

- Leaving behind rural ethnic women from development process will never end generational poverty circle, and discrimination.
Lessons Learned

- Lack of transparency, accountability and lack of community participation exacerbate inequality in wealth and resource distribution and widen poverty gap, social unrest, and conflict sensitivity.

- Lack of social license to operate leads to local opposition to development projects, causing both the company and the local community a substantial loss.

- Myanmar’s rapid uptake of mobile phones and social media, Facebook can increase chances to build up rural women’s capacity and their participation in development process.

- Laws and policies are still being reviewed and updated and implementation and compliance is a challenge in this setting, however, it can also be an opportunity for adopting more gender inclusive policies and approaches.
Policy Recommendations

- The government must clearly spell out its investment policy on large scale development projects that have potential negative impact on rural ethnic community and the environment to seek public opinion with gender focus before strategic decision is made. It needs to be done even prior to conducting an EIA.

- The current draft of the EIA public participation guideline needs to be gender sensitive and implemented effectively. The government must require project developers and companies to do effective stakeholder engagement throughout their project circle including monitoring and evaluation of the Environmental Management Plan, EMP, adopting grievance mechanism and sharing projects’ benefits or creating shared value with the local community via community investment projects.

- The government should institutionalize FPIC process in rural ethnic areas with gender focus at relevant laws and policies such as the bye-law of the Ethnic Rights Protection Law.

- The government must ensure mainstreaming women’s participation in every developmental process and support various activities and programs of CSOs, NGOs to remove barriers of women’s participation in decision making process.