

Abstract

An Overview of the Environmental Management of the Bakun Hydroelectric Project in Sarawak, Malaysia

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Abstract: Construction of large dams such as the Bakun Hydroelectric Project (Bakun HEP) has always been criticized for its great impact on the environment and often viewed as unsustainable. However, properly managed the project is not only environmentally sustainable, but is also economically necessary for Malaysia. In its effort to develop its economy and to meet the National Energy Policy the Malaysian Government aims to increase the hydro share of electricity generation from the present 10% to 20%. The Project, located in the East Malaysian State of Sarawak, has a capacity of 2,400 MW when fully completed. It has a 205m high concrete faced rock fill dam with a reservoir of 69,640 hectares and involves the resettlement of 10,000 inhabitants. The greatest challenge faced is the environmental management of the project rather than the technicalities of the construction. Besides conducting detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), regular monitoring, auditing and reporting of the compliance with the EIA approval conditions are necessary. This paper provides an overview of the environmental management of the Bakun HEP during the post-EIA dam construction period. It outlines some of the important steps, procedures and practices of the State Environment Authority, the Project Developer as well as the contractors in ensuring compliance to legislative environmental requirements. With adequate, practical and effective environmental monitoring, auditing and reporting put in place, the Bakun HEP is indeed a sustainable development project.

Keywords: Environmental Impact Assessment, Environmental Management Plan (EMP), Environmental Monitoring, Environmental Auditing, Environmental Reporting, Compliance Enforcement