



## Contact

Sustainable Hydropower Website  
C/- Hydro Tasmania  
4 Elizabeth St  
Hobart TAS 7000  
AUSTRALIA

[sustainable.hydropower@hydro.com.au](mailto:sustainable.hydropower@hydro.com.au)

# Population displacement

Population displacement is an issue of high sensitivity with some new hydropower developments, and it needs to be a guiding consideration in the planning, siting, assessment, design and management of any scheme.

## Issue

The displacement of communities has in notable cases been a factor causing an outcry against hydropower projects. Dam construction unavoidably results in areas of land being flooded, with other areas being set aside for infrastructure development and catchment conservation areas. Population displacement has occurred on a range of scales from several families to tens of thousands of people.

In some cases the land has been the home of, and provided the spiritual, social and economic resource base for local communities. Of particular concern has been the involuntary displacement and resettlement of minority groups who have a specific attachment to land because of its cultural significance. Land provides for material needs such as timber for housing, cooking and food supplies, as well as traditional medicinal remedies. Loss of land can be associated with a loss of cultural identity and spiritual belonging.

In cases those affected may be vulnerable to social deprivation through being ill-equipped to deal with an unfamiliar way of living, and having few transferable and usable skills or support networks. Women and children in particular may be vulnerable if they have no means of support.

Resettlement of people is consequently a sensitive issue, and needs to be planned and managed from project outset through a process of engagement and economic support.

## Management

The ideal hydropower development is one where there is no human displacement, or where there is no opposition from affected populations to resettlement. If population displacement is unavoidable, resettlement progresses most smoothly when there are adequate development policies, institutional and regulatory frameworks in place. These need to be supported by adequate levels of project financing with clearly defined roles for government and the developer.

Comprehensive resettlement and rehabilitation plans need to be developed and implemented in consultation with affected populations. Opportunities to modify scheme design to minimise population displacement need to be carefully examined. The knowledge of local communities and stakeholders should inform planning processes and development strategies.

All stakeholders have the right to be informed about the project and its ramifications on them at as early a stage as possible. Negotiated outcomes with people's representatives should be achieved wherever possible, and if necessary, a system of arbitration put in place to resolve differences.

Communities are best moved in their entirety with protection provided for indigenous peoples, women and children. Community development plans require implementation and monitoring through on-going consultation and liaison with community groups.

Communities or individuals who are disadvantaged by a project require adequate compensation, and ideally should see an improvement in their quality of life. Access to electricity, water and sanitation, and public health services, in conjunction with education opportunities are important aspects.