

## **GIBB prescribes best practice approach for infrastructure resettlement projects**

Involuntary resettlement due to infrastructural development has for the past twenty years seen more than 10 million people lose their homes on the African continent.

While infrastructure remains a foremost priority in Africa and particularly in South Africa with the National Development Plan topping the national agenda, GIBB's Sustainability Consultant, Shantal Rampath stresses that a more detailed consultative approach needs to be taken in relocating people, especially where livelihoods are concerned.

Employed within the multi-disciplinary engineering consulting firm's environmental and sustainability sector, Rampath presented a paper at the 2014 South African National Committee on Large Dams (SANCOLD) conference held recently in a bid to prescribe a guideline to manage the community consultation process more effectively.

While the focus at SANCOLD was sustainable dam developments in Southern Africa, the guidelines Rampath and GIBB Sustainability Manager, Karien Erasmus presented may be adopted and tailored for any infrastructural development.

"The model takes an approach aimed at addressing the potential negative impacts associated with resettlement at early stages of infrastructure projects. This model is particularly relevant to vulnerable communities in rural areas," she said.

Rampath said that while there are international standards like that of the World Bank and International Finance Cooperation, these do not adequately address post resettlement taking the longer term time

frame into account.

"Our model speaks to the post resettlement scenario, where development and poverty is a critical element once infrastructure projects are complete," she stressed.

In her research Rampath found that often, people are moved with little consideration for their future and this ultimately impacts negatively on quality of life, which is in stark contrast to what infrastructure development sets out to achieve, i.e. convenience and improvement.

Rampath cited examples of dam projects where communities were evidently not consulted properly:

"The Construction of Sèlinguè Dam in Mali affected people who lost their land

due to new irrigated plots. In addition, they were provided with very little support and could not form adaptive capacity and form new farming techniques in their new areas,” she revealed.

“As a result, many farmers were faced with disastrous crops and had their land taken away because they were failing to farm properly in new land plots. This impacted on loss of livelihoods and income generation from subsistence agriculture.”

Another example was the Tokwe Mukosi Dam project in Zimbabwe.

“Displacement of host populations and forced migration has led to the diminishing of cultural resources, livelihood displacement and increased vulnerability of local communities,” she added.

According to Rampath many affected people lost their livelihood strategies and became exposed to various risks and stress during resettlement.

She advised that the long term view takes cognisance of assistance and services that last beyond the project completion phase, and the generic long term impacts of resettlement are not just about losing infrastructure - it is also about losing livelihoods. “It is important to remember that a lot of resettlement cases involve women and child headed households who are vulnerable and not adequately equipped to rebuild their lives after resettlement,” she said.

Some of the challenges relating to infrastructure projects include: poverty, service delivery issues, social exclusion and the fact that project affected people lack opportunities and experience to make the best decisions and form adaptive capacity in resettled locations.

“The guidelines and sustainability model fulfils a comprehensive requirement for post project monitoring. This has been identified as one of the gaps in most resettlement cases where post project monitoring was not addressed holistically taking into account long term issues,” said Rampath.

“The first pillar which refers to localised sustainable economic growth should be cantered on policies and programmes which stimulate economic activity. These activities should benefit long term development and the welfare of the affected person/s during resettlement. Applied early in a project, this pillar should lead to societal benefits that contribute to addressing social issues,” explained Rampath.

The benefit, she claims is that growth in turn produces an increase in income levels and wages improves public revenues.

“Growth and infrastructure development will increase capacity and efficiency and allow people to develop their skills while providing employment.”

The second pillar, which represents inclusive social development, refers to access to basic facilities such as education, healthcare and necessary social services, which establish opportunities to increase participation and the overall welfare of affected communities.

"Finally, the third pillar, local authority support, stresses the importance of good governance and a local support regime by using indicators such as public capacitation, forming partnerships with civil society and mainstreaming good governance," she said.

"I believe that sustainability should form the cornerstone of resettlement as outlined in the guidelines. However, sustainability could easily be seen as vague due to its broad definition. The key to effectively integrating sustainability into an early resettlement planning process relates to measurability and applicability," she warns.