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Stakeholder Engagement in Hydropower Projects in Brazil

Stakeholders' engagement and institutional articulation plays a fundamental role in the implementation of hydropower plants, mainly in the environmental licensing process that demands interaction between public and private agents with different interests. It is not enough to identify affected stakeholders and the potential conflicts of the project, negotiation and participation strategies must be established since the early stages of the planning process. This was one of the conclusions from R&D project developed by Cepel with financial support from the World Bank (META project), which was improved and its last version will be published as a chapter in the book Renewable Energy Production and Distribution: Solutions and Opportunities (in press), associated with the concept of Sustainable Hydropower Plants.

According to the methodology, the careful identification of existing and potential stakeholders and conflicts in the region, still in the early stage, can minimize the impacts that may occur in the subsequent stages, allowing the formulation of an Institutional Articulation Plan that addresses the identified issues. It is estimated that the greater the socio-environmental complexity of the project, the greater the level of institutional action needed to make it feasible.

The Institutional Articulation Plan must consider the following content:

- Definition of objectives and justification to promote institutional understanding to meet the goals proposed for the implementation of sustainable HPPs.
- Identification and analysis of stakeholders from the beginning of the sustainable HPP planning to organize and enhance the articulation with the involved parties.
- Elaboration of Institutional Articulation Actions in order to minimize the conflicts verified in the early stage.
- Implementation of the articulation framework with identification of stakeholders
- Guidance on which federal agencies and entities may be contacted and involved in the various stages of the HPP planning and environmental licensing process, and suggestions of actions, schedules, and other relevant information.

The main objectives of the articulation framework proposed by the Sustainable Hydropower Plant methodology are the establishment of mechanisms for participation and monitoring of the entire process of HPP implementation, as well as the establishment of an important relationship channel with those involved. This articulation framework can include an Interministerial Commission, at least three thematic Monitoring Committees (for Indigenous and Traditional Communities, Protected Areas, and Licensing) and an Advisory Community Council.

The Interministerial Commission is the first level of this framework, being constituted by representatives designated by the Ministries related to Energy, Environment, and other ministries involved in the process, in order to support institutional articulation and the relationship with the stakeholders, enhancing the interaction of the different actors and the participation of the affected communities in the planning process. The focus is to establish more effective negotiation strategies and anticipate the handling of conflicts already identified in the early stage. This Commission is also responsible for creating the Monitoring Committees foreseen in the articulation framework: The Indigenous and Traditional Communities Monitoring Committee, the Protected Areas Monitoring Committee, and the Licensing Monitoring Committee.

It is proposed that all committees must have two levels of participation: the Core Group, consisting of public and private institutions involved in the topic, and the Global Group, which includes affected parties and other interested parties. The technical meetings and those to define strategies of actions will be composed by the participants of the Core Group, and the other meetings will also include the Global Group. The articulation framework also includes a Community Consultative Council (COHID/IBAMA, 2013) for the relationship with the HPP surrounding communities.

When the hydropower plant implementation involves indigenous lands, the creation of the Indigenous and Traditional Communities Monitoring Committee, as mentioned above, will aim to promote informed participation from the initial stages of the sustainable HPP planning and its continuation throughout the entire environmental licensing process, monitoring the implementation of plans, programs and mitigating measures that will be defined. In the specific case of indigenous populations, it is important to develop a process of trust, adopt ethical discourse and include the communities in the decision-making process.

It is equally important to encourage community participation in monitoring the entire process from the early stage, with effective communication actions, leveling information about the project among stakeholders, and establishing negotiation strategies that can anticipate the treatment of conflicts. These actions must begin in the

initial stages of the project to avoid contrary reactions associated with expectations of the socio-economic and environmental impacts on the region. The greater the size of the infrastructure, the greater the expectation.

In the planning stage of a HPP, two legal instruments related to communication are highlighted: public participation and the consultation process. Public participation is fundamental for an effective decision-making process through public hearings and continuous access to information. The consultation process is a complex task, whose procedures must allow stakeholders to be heard and their arguments to be considered in the debate, so that the population can achieve an informed opinion. All stakeholders must be treated fairly, and their roles must be clearly defined because equity and justice are often issues that are at the heart of the conflict over decisions involving projects with significant environmental consequences.