

**NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINING DAM DEVELOPMENT IN
GHANA**

**REPORT ON
VRA –AJENA/PESE RESOLUTION-AJENA/PESE MEETING
13th March, 2009**

Secretariat, Ghana Dams Dialogue

VRA –AJENA/PESE RESOLUTION MEETING

AJENA/PESE MEETING

The Queenmother who is also a member of the Ghana Dams Forum welcomed and introduced the representatives of the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) of the Ghana Dams Forum to the members of the two communities gathered for the meeting. She further introduced the community and the leaders of both communities.

Mr. Richard Koranteng accepted their welcome on behalf of the NCC members. He expressed the pleasure of the NCC members that the community had accepted to honour their urgent call and informed them of the purpose of the meeting. Then he informed the community of the objectives of the Ghana Dams Forum, of which Ajena is a member and represented by their Queenmother. He added that, the NCC members had heard of the problem facing the two communities via one radio station which was subsequently confirmed by the Queenmother. The NCC wished to hear directly from the community about the reasons for the proposed demonstration so as to assess for themselves how best to proceed in mediating for settling the matter. Since the Volta River Authority (VRA) is also a member of the Ghana Dams Forum, the NCC Secretariat had already contacted them with a suggestion to look for a better way to resolve the situation. He concluded by asking the community to inform the NCC representatives of the situation from their perspective.

Following on long deliberations and discussions, the issues raised by the two communities, are summarized below:

1. The two communities were resettled to their current location in 1963. During the process, they were informed that this location was only temporary and that they would be moved to a permanent place later. However this promise has not been fulfilled during the past 46 years. They suggested that VRA should find a better way to regularize their current status to a permanent one with the right legal documentation to indicate ownership rights.
2. They were also promised by the first President, to be provided with free electricity for non commercial users when the dam is operational. However it was not until the year 2000 that the two communities were connected to the national grid for electricity.
3. The low quality of the building materials used for construction, which had resulted in lack of safety of the buildings.
4. A number of other promises made to them (including compensation, creation of industries) which are yet to be fully met.
5. VRA has not provided them with good schools, roads and water.
6. VRA has employed very few persons from the two villages on their workforce.

7. Dissatisfaction of some, about the size of houses. Uniform housing had been provided not taking into account the existing sizes of houses. Individuals who personally had more than three rooms were given the same number of rooms (thus one) given to every person. Unfortunately, the room also had no kitchen, bathroom and toilet facilities.
8. Transparency and accountability on utilizing the VRA Trust Fund.
9. After the overthrow of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's regime, their lands were taken over by the Gyakiti landlords who did not receive compensation or were paid insufficiently. The other options to acquire farm lands were very difficult to the extent that most farmers had to stop farming.
10. They hold the VRA responsible for the high level of urban migration in the community, explaining that it is the neglect of the community by VRA which has caused this.
11. The community mentioned the fact that, they have sat with VRA and talked on different issues for a number of years but none of them have been fulfilled. They believed a better form of communication like a dialogue process facilitated by recognized bodies can help communicate well their problems.
12. Finally, on Wednesday, 4th March, 2009 the electricity was disconnected from the main transformer. The community sent a petition to VRA and others in authority hoping to get their lights connected but with no success. They were now into the 6th day without electricity. Their main concern is about school pupils preparing for exams who urgently need the light and also the Clinic which needs power to keep their drugs cold. Having no better option, they agreed to demonstrate to show the entire nation about their predicament.

After the community expressed their feelings, Mr. Edmund Kyei Akoto-Danso informed them that, the NCC really sympathized with them. Above all, the NCC did not believe that, demonstration can ever be the best option to resolve problems as these could result in violence. In any event, whatever the community decision the NCC was still committed to solving the problems amicably with the VRA. They mentioned that the VRA had shown willingness to discuss the issues with the leaders of the two communities when other issues besides the reconnection could be discussed.

After reflecting on the advice from the NCC representatives the community decided to concur with the approach proposed by the NCC members and put their demonstration on hold.

The meeting ended peacefully.

Present at the Meeting:

- Representative of the NCC of the Ghana Dams Dialogue
- The Chief and leaders of Ajena and Pese
- The Queenmother of Ajena
- Youth leaders of Ajena and Pese
- Leaders of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches
- Inspector of the Ajena Police Station
- A section of the community including young and old.

Some facts on the background to the situation:

These two communities feel they have traditional rights (we need more understanding of why they feel this so strongly and not the other 50 resettled communities). One reason is the grievance they have about the loss of a thriving market in Ajena due to the establishment of a new commercial center by the VRA and thus suffering economic losses. From the time the connections were given in 2000 these two (2) communities have not been paying their electricity bills. The same transformer serves other communities who have continued paying for electricity. (Since the 50 other resettled communities seem to be paying for electricity, VRA may legitimately find it difficult to condone their behaviour unless they understand the specificity of the situation if this is the case.)

In the past the VRA had tried to interrupt services, but had been prevented by the communities who have also set up security measures preventing access to VRA officers.

This time VRA had managed to enter the premises and shut down the transformer thus affecting not just the non paying communities, but also those paying their bills and connected to the same line.

Communities need training in being more organized and presenting their needs in a prioritized manner. Help them to work out how



NCC Representative talking to the community



Members gathered at the meeting



A community member expressing herself



A community member expressing himself