

Two Decades After Forced Relocation, Yangtze Dam Evictees Lack Compensation

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Protesters demand that government officials compensate them for forced evictions and relocations from the Three Gorges Dam project in the Hechuan district of Chongqing in southwestern China, April 5, 2016.

Photo courtesy of protesters

More than 20 years after construction began on China's massive Yangtze River hydropower project, the Three Gorges dam, hundreds of people are still pursuing complaints over their eviction and relocation, petitioners told RFA on Wednesday.

Some 1.2 million people living along the banks of the Yangtze were relocated during the 1990s to make way for the project.

But many say they have yet to receive the promised amount in compensation.

"This hasn't been resolved for any of us yet," a petitioner surnamed Wu, who was among 500 people relocated to the megacity of Chongqing for the project, told RFA.

"We made complaints, and the police told us to go home, and we were escorted back home [by interceptors]," he said. "When we got home, still nothing was done, even though the Three Gorges Construction Committee knows about our situation."

A woman who gave only her surname Tang said she and many others relocated to Chongqing are similarly affected, but are too busy making a living to have time to pursue long-running compensation claims.

"I know that the relocation authorities didn't proceed according to government policy, and that nobody has had their case resolved yet," Tang said. "They are just dragging their feet."

"I haven't had time to come up with a plan because I now have to work so I can put food on the table," she said. "We have no land left now."

'They dare not act'

A third resident, surnamed Li, said the communities had moved so as to cooperate with a state construction project, but that the government had appropriated their compensation money.

"We have been to complain about this, but they do nothing about it," Li said. "We have even been to Beijing on several occasions, but they dare not act."

He said local media were also apparently barred from covering the lack of compensation.

"Journalists don't dare to report this either," Li said.

Meanwhile, a petitioner surnamed Xie said he has been detained for pursuing his compensation claims in the face of official stonewalling.

"I am doing this to protect my own interests regarding the matter of compensation," Xie said, in apparent fear of being found out speaking to overseas media. "I don't know what to tell you ... It's not convenient for me to speak."

Local residents, who were relocated from towns and villages along a 193-kilometer (120-mile) stretch upstream of the Three Gorges dam site, say they have received less than 30,000 yuan (U.S. \$4,600) per person in compensation, far less than was promised in the original relocation deal.

'Festering bog'

Environmental activists have repeatedly criticized Beijing's flagship dam as a prestige project for the ruling Chinese Communist Party that has brought environmental catastrophe to delicate ecosystems.

"The environmental impacts of the project are profound and are likely to get worse as time goes on," the pressure group International Rivers said in an article on the Three Gorges on its website.

It said hundreds of factories, mines and waste dumps were submerged in the flooding of the Three Gorges section of the Yangtze, creating a "festering bog of effluent, silt, industrial pollutants and rubbish in the reservoir."

While the sheer weight of water in the reservoir has raised concerns among seismologists over reservoir-induced earthquakes, the damming of such a large river has threatened fisheries and caused massive soil erosion downstream, the group said.

Chinese officials acknowledged for the first time in 2011 that there are "urgent problems" linked to the construction of the dam.

Reported by Wen Yuqing for RFA's Cantonese Service. Translated and written in English by Luisetta Mudie.

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