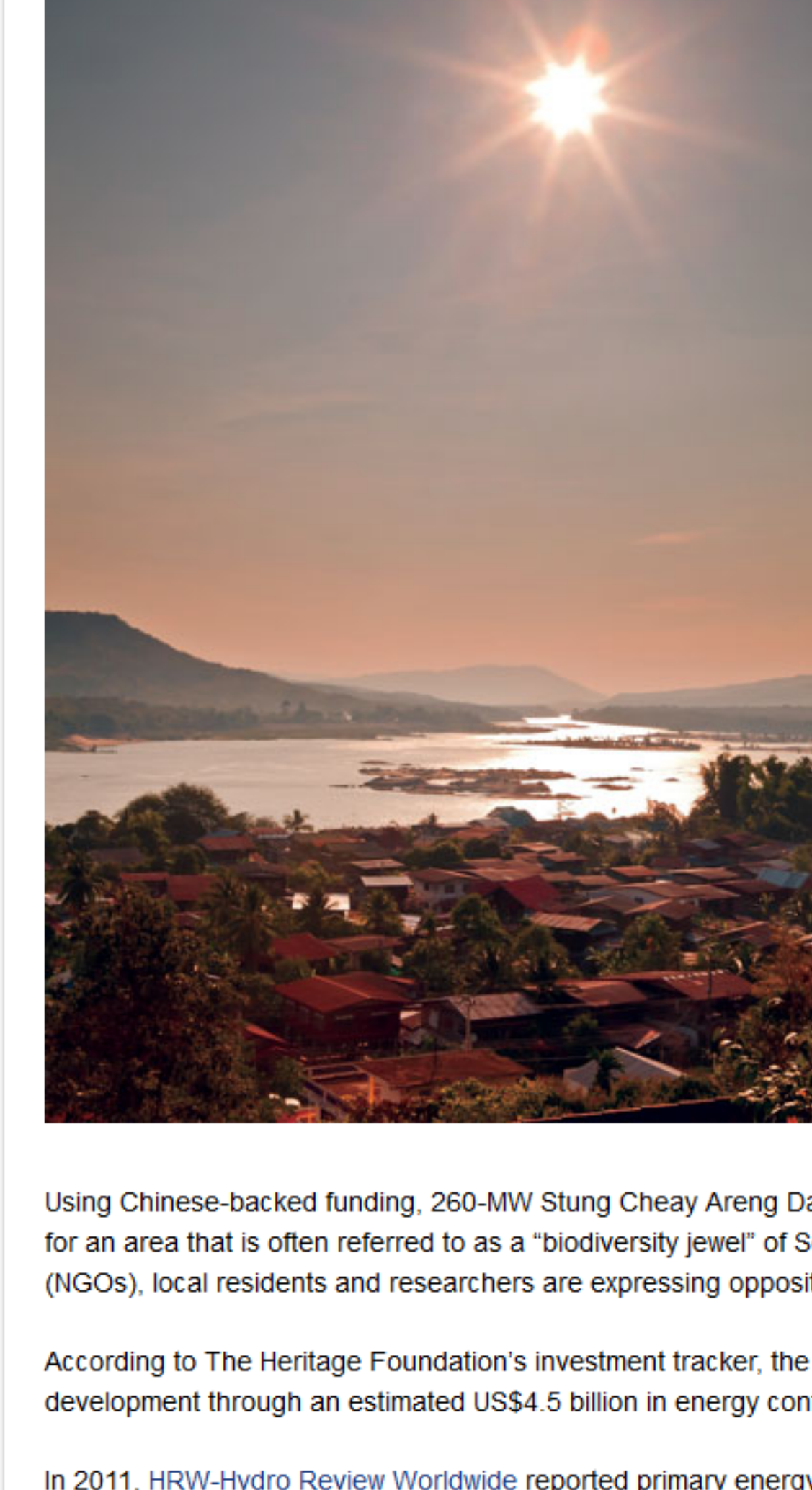




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Opposition to proposed hydroelectric 260-MW Stung Cheay Areng Dam in "biodiversity jewel" of Southeast Asia



KOH KONG PROVINCE, Cambodia
10/29/2014
By Gregory B. Poindexter, Associate Editor

Using Chinese-backed funding, 260-MW Stung Cheay Areng Dam in Cheay Areng Valley, Cambodia, along the Mekong Delta is planned for an area that is often referred to as a "biodiversity jewel" of Southeast Asia.

According to The Heritage Foundation's investment tracker, the hydroelectric program for Cambodia has Chinese companies driving development through an estimated US\$4.5 billion in energy contracts and investments.

In 2011, HRW-Hydro Review Worldwide reported primary energy demand in Cambodia was expected to grow 3.7% per year from 2005 to 2030, according to a report from the Asian Development Bank and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

Activity for the 260-MW Stung Cheay Areng Dam include the following:

- China Southern Power Grid signed two Memoranda of Understanding in 2006 with the Cambodian Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy to conduct a feasibility study for the hydropower project
Stung Cheay Areng Dam is one of 17 dams the Cambodian government intends to build by 2030
China-based Sinohydro Resources is contracted by the Cambodian government to construct the dam

Opposition
The site for Stung Cheay Areng Dam is in the Central Cardamom Protected Forest, according to Princeton University-based international affairs researcher Pichamon Yeophantong.

"Opposition stems around the dam's reservoir that is expected to flood nine villages, populated by more than 1,500 mostly indigenous people, as well as inundate up to 2,000 hectares of indigenous land (of which 500 would have been sacred land)," Yeophantong said.

International NGOs
According to Kalyanee Mam, a Cambodian-American filmmaker who documented the struggles of Cambodian families in the region, "local NGOs like Mother Nature and Khmer Youth Empire continue to wage an empowering social-media campaign against the dam and rallying protests in Phnom Penh."

Mam's comments are published in an article on MotherJones.com. She also said international environmental organizations that include International Rivers, Conservation International and Wildlife Alliance are exerting pressure on the Cambodian government and Chinese companies to pull out.

According to Reed-Monitor.org, another film maker, Rob Harbinson, also travelled to the Areng Valley earlier this year. His film, "Defenders of the Spirit Forest," documents the villagers' opposition to the dam and exposes how Fauna and Flora International, instead of opposing the dam, are attempting to relocate Siamese crocodiles from the river - against the wishes of the communities living there, to whom the crocodiles are sacred.

Local reports
Local news outlets report government officials are giving conflicting statements about whether the Stung Cheay Areng Dam will move forward.

According to an article in the Oct. 29 issue of The Phnom Penh Post, Prime Minister Hun Sen recently offered assurances that construction of the controversial Stung Cheay Areng Dam would not be allowed to begin in the near future, but local officials are allegedly pushing forward with plans to relocate villagers.

Hun Sen is the most-tenured prime minister for Cambodia, having held the office since 1998. According to the Post, Cambodia National Rescue Party leader Sam Rainsy said Hun Sen had assured him, on the sidelines of a parliamentary session in which the project was discussed, that the dam's construction had not been definitively decided and that it may be left to future generations.

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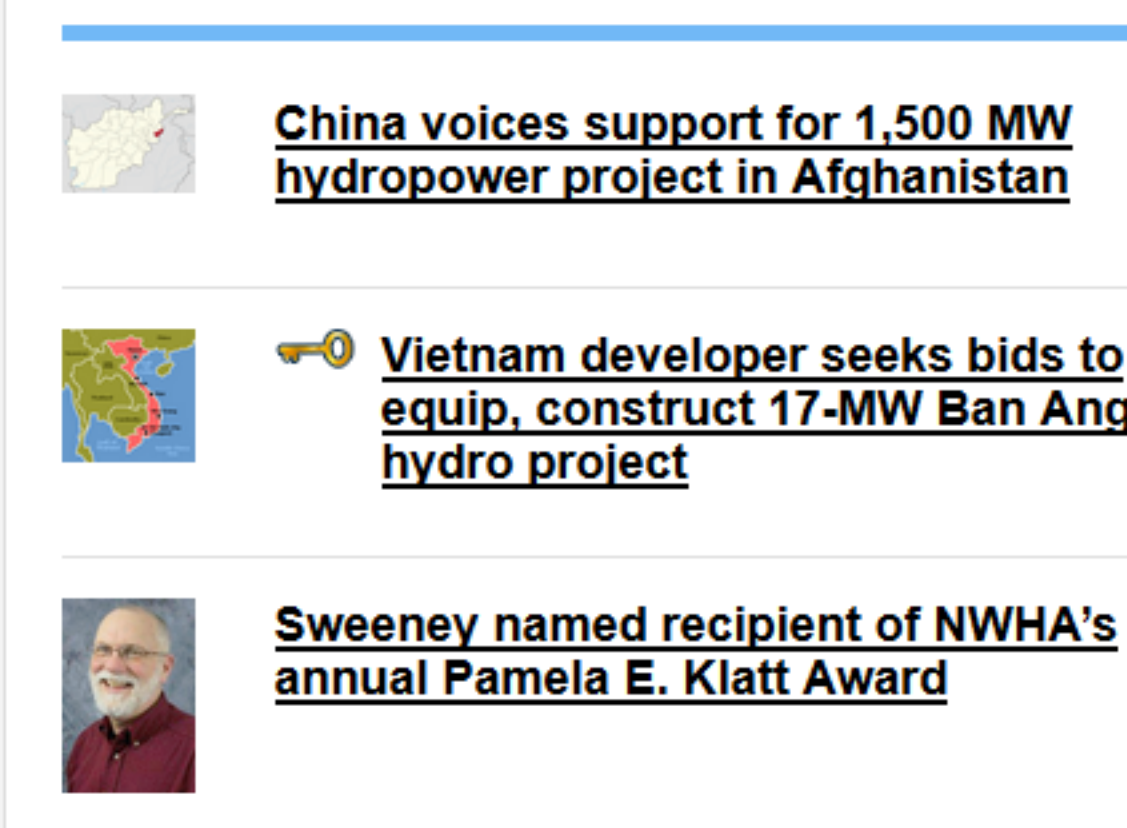


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