**Introduction:**

The Right to Development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized. To realize this right, the human person is placed at the center of development as an active participant and beneficiary of this right[[1]](#footnote-1).

International Accountability Project (IAP) seeks to realize this right by ensuring that all people actively shape the decisions that affect their homes, environment and communities in the development process. IAP identifies development financial institutions that offer financial support and standard-setting processes with the greatest impact on people’s ability to shape their own development and provide remedies when rights are violated. IAP assists communities to gather their own community-led research on their development priorities, their experience in the development process and the potential impacts of development projects as a mobilization tool and to influence the policy and practice of development.

IAP’s intervention seeks to protect among others the right to property, particularly land rights, in the event that the state needs to compulsorily acquire land for the implementation of development projects. Emphasis is placed on the requirement for prompt payment of fair and adequate compensation prior to the taking of possession or acquisition of the property and the right of access to a court of law by any person who has an interest or right over the property. This is in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, 2015 that seeks to establish a forum that will encourage a greater range of voices to be heard, particularly from developing coun­tries, to identify and address infrastructure and capacity gaps and work to ensure that investments in transport, energy and water work for the people.

However, despite the existence of regulatory frameworks for the realization of a right to development, communities are still faced with rights violations primarily stemming from sidelining people in determining the course of development. This calls for measures that seek to ground the role of communities in the development process and ensure that their engagements are meaningful and sustainable.

**Strategies for integration of Rights Based Approach into human development:**

Access to information prior to approval for financing for a development project stands central in the protection of rights for project affected persons. At IAP, an Early Warning System was developed to provide local communities and organizations with verified information about proposed large scale development projects funded by development banks and international governments likely to cause human and environmental rights abuses and to aid the formulation of clear strategies for advocacy.This tool exposes trends in development finance by sector, bank, geography and community response and enlists proactive and preventative actions to change or stop harmful development projects before funding is agreed by the banks, governments and private investors. What stands out in the application of this system is the ability to provide information to facilitate community action before the project is approved for funding. This enables affected persons to propose changes to the project or stop its financing upon proving that it has a high potential for human rights violations .

Using early warning information, affected communities conduct community-led research[[2]](#footnote-2) to ascertain the level of knowledge of the project among the project affected persons and to provide recommendations to stop or change the proposed project. Herein, the community builds upon its local knowledge, customs and traditions, and owns the knowledge that is being produced using their experience and expertise. Ultimately, this information is used for community-led campaigns to propose changes to the project through interactions between communities and project financiers, governments and private actors. What is done differently here is that despite the existence of information about the project from the project financiers or government, communities generate their own information for advocacy because quite often, the documents provided by the project team are not a true representation of the aspirations and concerns of affected persons.

**Success Story- A Case of Lilongwe Water Project, Malawi:**

In a major victory for communities, the European Investment Bank recently declined to proceed with its appraisal of the Lilongwe Water Project, a proposed $290 million USD infrastructure project that would have adversely affected the homes and livelihoods of 5,100 people living in the Dedza and Lilongwe districts of Malawi. The announcement came not long after decisions by both the World Bank and the African Development Bank to withdraw from the proposed project, citing financial concerns and risks associated with resettlement.

The stated objective of the Lilongwe Water Project was to expand access to water services in the city of Lilongwe, Malawi and to improve the financial and operational performance of the Lilongwe Water Board, a government body tasked with providing potable water to Lilongwe city and its surrounding areas. The project was categorized as high risk and its most destructive impacts were linked to the construction of the Diamphwe Multipurpose Dam. The construction of the dam and reservoir meant thousands of households would lose their farmland, livelihoods, housing and access to common resources like schools, markets and graveyards. The dam also posed adverse and irreversible environmental impacts, affecting natural habitats and wildlife. For details; <https://www.openglobalrights.org/using-community-led-activism-and-public-opinion-to-stop-harmful-development/?lang=English>

**Going forward:**

Progressively, there is increased responsiveness to requests for information about proposed projects that are to be funded by International Financial Institutions and strengthening of dispute resolution mechanisms during project implementation. These are incremental steps towards the realization of the right to development for communities are bound to provide input through consultations during project development as well as their active involvement in the implementation process. This is further strengthened by IAP’s membership in regional and international coalitions including the African Coalition on Corporate Accountability (ACCA) and Coalition on Human Rights in Development (CHRD) that create the direct link and cause interactions between communities and international finance institutions for remedy in case of disputes.

1. Article 2(1) The human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to the Mekong Community Institute, community-led research is defined as *“searching for knowledge in a local community by villagers, based on local knowledge, for the community’s benefit.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)