

Irked by the prospect of yet another dam, NGO urges Sabah govt to bin project completely

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The Warisan Plus government renamed the Kaiduan Dam and relocated it downriver in an adjacent constituency when it came to power in 2018. — Picture by Firdaus Latif

KOTA KINABALU, Dec 23 — A non-governmental organisation (NGO) here is seeking clarification from the state government on its plans for a dam at the Papar River which has been a matter of contention for years.

The Taskforce Against Kaiduan Dam (TAKAD) today said local communities were unaware of the project's resumption and called for the state government to end any future proposals to build a dam in the area.

"We find the ministry's statement on the dam confusing and contradictory. We call on the ministry to be clear on the alternative solution to the problem," said the group in a statement here today.

"As the community directly affected by the dam project, we have the right to be informed and given freedom to decide as stated in the Indigenous People Rights Declaration for free, prior, and informed consent."

The group said the indigenous communities who live along the Papar River would be adversely affected by any development, as it would destroy their livelihood and way of living.

"We hope that the new government will be more open-minded and not repeat the mistakes of the previous government who ignored the voices of the people here and their indigenous land rights in their quest to find a solution to their water supply problem.

"We hope that they will involve the villagers in any evaluation or planning of projects for water problems and not just make a decision based on their own agenda and priorities," the group said.

Sabah Assistant Works Minister Datuk Limus Jury yesterday told the State Assembly that the government would replace the Papar Dam with "phase three of the Kota Kinabalu water supply plan — which includes the construction of a dam, formerly known as the Kaiduan Dam.

While he did not describe what the plan entailed, he said that the state government has engaged Universiti Malaysia Sabah and the Institute of Development Studies Sabah (IDS) to carry out research and would proceed, while following their assessment.

The Papar Dam, formerly known as the Kaiduan Dam, was first mooted by the Barisan Nasional government to end the acute water shortage in Sabah's west coast by 2024.

Facing strong opposition due to environmental concerns as well as its socio-economic impact, the dam was delayed several times over the years and used as a political tool by warring political parties.

When the Warisan Plus government came to power in 2018, the dam was renamed Papar Dam and relocated downriver in an adjacent constituency, irking the local communities further.