BRANDING DAMS: Nam Theun 2 and the production of a “Sustainable Hydropower” Discourse

Welcome to Nam Theun 2 Power Company (NTPC)

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Introduction

- The Nam Theun 2 – a project of great attention by media, civil society, researchers and the hydropower industry

- NT2 has become its own global brand in hydropower development, and a symbol of the sector’s revival

- In Laos, NT2 now stands as an anachronism as a new wave hydropower industry has boomed rapidly around it
Nirvana concepts, narratives and models

• Discourse: “a shared set of concepts, categories, and ideas that provides its adherents with a framework for making sense of situations, embodying judgments, assumptions, capabilities, dispositions, and intentions”

• Nirvana concepts: “concepts that embody an ideal image of what the world should tend to”

• Narrative: “simple stories with beginnings defining the problem, middles elaborating the consequences and ends outlining the solutions”

• Model: “based on particular instances of policy reforms or development interventions which embody a dimension of 'success' ... They are apparently sanctioned by experience, approved by experts and powerful institutions...”

The World Bank’s book argues that NT2:

“… demonstrates that hydropower projects can be designed and implemented to deliver sustainable outcomes through state-of-the-art environmental and social practices and strengthened public financial management systems, but this takes a long time.”
# Nam Theun 2 Social and Environment Project

**NT2 Multipurpose Development Project: Overview and Update**

**August 16, 2012** – The Nam Theun 2 multipurpose development project (NT2) is larger and more complex than any other hydropower project in Lao PDR. [Read More »](#)

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<th>IMPLEMENTATION RATINGS</th>
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<td>06-13-2017</td>
<td>01-06-2018</td>
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<td>Progress towards achievement of PDO</td>
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<td>Overall Implementation Progress</td>
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<td>Overall Risk</td>
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“There's a lot riding on NT2. Laos needs the boost to its economy and its human-rights credentials. The World Bank wants to prove that kinder, gentler megaprojects are possible...” [Nov 2007]
Development Banks Step Up Lending For Hydropower, Sustainability Remains Focus

By Andrea Vittorio

Leading multilateral development banks have recently stepped up financing of large hydropower projects after a decade-long slowdown due to environmental and social concerns, according to an analysis of bank data by BNA.

Lending by three major banks—the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development—increased fivefold from 2003 to 2012, as hydropower...
“The Nam Theun 2 project is an outstanding example of how the Government of the Lao PDR is working with the private sector and multilateral organisations to develop a model of sustainable development with strong economic, social, and environment fundamentals. The Project has long been recognised by independent experts as having great potential to achieve the country’s development objectives…”
"I think that in the future, the government will refer to the success of the Nam Theun 2 power plant, as it is a good model. [The government] is now inspecting and evaluating [hydropower] projects to ensure that they are the best possible," he said, when meeting with World Bank officials last Friday.

In the meeting with World Bank officials, Prime Minister Thongloun said these [the need to balance economic gain with environmental protection and rural community development] important aspects of the project made the Nam Theun 2 a top quality and sustainable hydropower plant.
“Yes, they are saying that Nam Theun 2 is a very good project. But to use it as a standard, it’s not possible. We can use it as a good example, a good guide line, but not as a standard. All the developers say that it is not possible to use Nam Theun 2 as a standard.”

Head of Department, Department of Electricity, Ministry of Energy and Mines, (cited by Jusi 2011)
“Although developments are mostly positive, some disturbing elements are emerging amidst the flurry of activity. … Currently, private sector developers, including some that may not be reputable hydropower companies, appear to be driving the agenda. To support long-term sustainable development of the country’s hydropower resources, it will be important for the government to remain focused on its priorities and core principles; …”

(Illangovan 2011 in Building a Better Dam)
SK E&C’s attempts to cut costs led to design changes that resulted in collapse of dam in Laos

Funding for dam provided without National Assembly review despite being an ODA project

NSS Labs NGFW Test Report

Editorial · opinion
[Editorial] GM Korea should heed the words of stakeholders
[Editorial] South and North need hasty implementation of Inter-
[Column] Skewed statistics on North Korea’s economic status
[Editorial] Kang’s remarks are problematic but conservative opposition is wildly overreacting

english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/865895.html
Spreading “sustainable hydropower” beyond Laos in Southeast Asia

• In 2012 the World Bank Group’s International Finance Corporation (IFC) created a regional “Hydropower Advisory” service

• In 2013 the IFC and the Lao National Chamber of Commerce launched the Laos Hydropower Developers Working Group

• In 2016, the Myanmar Hydropower Developers Working Group was launched
Promoting the Laos hydropower narrative globally
Sustainable Hydropower: Attainable?

- Dams have made an important and significant contribution to human development, and the benefits derived from them have been considerable … In too many cases an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms, by people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers and by the natural environment.
Sustainable Hydropower: An industry response

www.sustainablehydropower.org
Dam Greenwashing Flows at World Water Forum

By: Zachary Huwitz

“Sustainability” Tool Protects Dam Builders, Not Rivers and Rights

The stated goal of this year’s World Water Forum – the world’s largest meeting devoted to water – is to create solutions to the water, energy, and food challenges presented by climate change and economic growth. However, some of the “solutions” being presented will do more to protect business-as-usual interests rather than spark innovative approaches to tackling our most pressing water-related problems.

The sixth World Water Forum (this year in Marseille, France from March 12-17) is, like its predecessors, heavily weighted with corporate players, including many from the large dam industry, making pitches for large-scale projects and private-sector...
Conclusion: Deconstructing “Nam Theun 2™” and “Sustainable Hydropower”

• Discourse of “sustainable hydropower” reframes the industry as one that can manage environmental and social impacts, and be a solution for adaptation and mitigation for climate change in Southeast Asia and globally.

• Even in the case of NT2, where some aspects were better than past hydropower dams in Laos, problems still remain; for many regional developers, the discourse and practices of “sustainably hydropower” have had limited impact.

• For sustainable energy transition, need to re-frame debate beyond sustainable hydropower and towards comprehensive forms of energy options assessments.
Thank you for listening

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