Gender in the Xe Bang Fai river basin after the Nam Theun 2 Dam

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Thai villagers protest World Bank’s Pak Mun Project

From Pak Mun to Nam Theun 2 Dam: Lessons have rarely learnt. In Thailand, by the early 1990s, local resistance made it more difficult for EGAT and its backers to build new dams.
16 Prime ministers,
19 Governments
over 27 years

From Pak Mun dam to NT2 dam: The lesson has rarely been learnt

May 2017 Protest
The People and Their River Revisited - 2014

Follow-up on 2001 study which documented the livelihood links people have to the Xe Bang Fai.


Three weeks of independent fieldwork in January, 2014.

Over 100 interviews conducted all along the Xe Bang Fai.
As one woman said in 2001, “I only catch small amount of small shrimp and fish in the rapids...but I catch them every day and they are enough to feed my family.” (Shoemaker et al. 2001: 62).

2001 Based line data from People and Their River
- 150 communities
- Mostly indigenous people
- Engaged captured fishers, aquatic resources and collected NTFPs for subsistent livelihoods
STUDY RESULTS:

Interviewees report significant impacts from NT2:

- Dramatic reductions in fish catch -- previously the main cornerstone of local livelihoods.
- Loss of riverbank gardens due to fluctuating water levels.
- Impacts on water quality and supply.
• Loss of rainy-season rice cultivation due to excessive flooding in the Xe Bang Fai.

• NT2’s Downstream Compensation Program (DSP) was inadequate -- over 90% see it as NOT making up for fisheries-related losses and other problems.

• Promotion of dry season pump irrigation has failed to compensate people for the loss of rainy season rice cultivation due to high costs for electricity, fertilizer, etc.
• Women and poorer/indigenous households especially impacted—and less able to take advantage of compensation programs.

• People left worse off from just below the dam all the way down to the Mekong confluence.

• Reliance on one time payments and risky development initiatives. But impacts will continue throughout the life of the project.
KEY POINTS:

No substantive compensation for fishery related losses.

Following “handover” little or no GOL follow-up—compensation programs quickly terminated. Even though developers and GOL are projected to earn several billion dollars.

Grievance process not functioning—many villagers reported fearing arrest if they complain or speak out against the project.
Closing the gates of NT2:
The last day of the Nam Theun River’s natural flow
2. Approximately 150,000 more people (including Indigenous People) affected downstream in the Xe Bang Fai and Nam Theun river basins.
What happened downstream?

• Dramatic reductions in Xe Bang Fai fish catch – the cornerstone of local livelihoods.

• Loss of riverbank gardens due to fluctuating water levels.

• Impacts on water quality and supply.

• Disproportionate impacts on women and Indigenous Peoples.
Women in the context of environmental destruction
Methods: ethnographic study
• Dependency on Nam Phit wetlands and Huay Kama river
• Food security and extra income
• Poorer
• Exacerbation of suffering
  – Resettled three times
  – Death of the first husband
  – Leaving of the second husband
Brou women and forced resettlement

Developers never acknowledged downstream resettlement
• Dry season rice, “Na Seang” with irrigated water
  • High cost
  • Loss of self sufficiency
• Loss of rainy-season rice cultivation due to excessive flooding in the Xe Bang Fai.

• Dry season pump irrigation failed to substitute for this, due to high cost.

• Compensation inadequate -- over 90% of residents say it does not make up for their losses.
High water levels, collapse of river banks, steep river banks

- Loss of women’s fishing sites, rapids, holes, sand dune,
- Loss of food security/riverbank gardens
Downstream Areas: Xe Bang Fai River Basin

Downstream Compensation Program terminated prematurely when allocated funds ran out in 2013—before restoring livelihoods.

World Bank was supportive of the early “handover” to GOL, the POE was not.
Key messages from gender research

• NT2 project marginalizes women and ethnic minority
• Invisibility of dam affected people: livelihoods and suffering/emotion in everyday life
• Less concern and attention to the rights of dam affected people in downstream areas
• Failure of “tracking system” of cumulative post-dam impacts
World Bank promising to “do better” resettlement. But NT2 experience points to the difficulty—or impossibility—of restoring traditional livelihoods and ecosystems.

“We took a hard look at ourselves on resettlement and what we found caused me deep concern. We found several major problems. One is that we haven’t done a good enough job in overseeing projects involving resettlement; two, we haven’t implemented those plans well enough; and three, we haven’t put in place strong tracking systems to make sure that our policies were being followed. We must and will do better.” (World Bank 2015)