

Ethnic Women & Water Governance in Khammouane Province, Lao PDR



Summary:

Lao PDR's rapidly growing hydropower sector provides an opportunity to integrate principles of sustainability and gender equality in all infrastructure and energy development processes. Hydropower developers have taken strong efforts to ensure projects are gender-sensitive, especially in regards to resettling and relocating communities. However, the intersection of gender and ethnicity is rarely considered in social impact assessments, and there is very little data on the specific challenges faced by ethnic women as project affected people.[1]

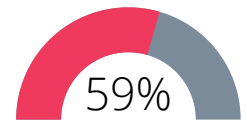
Target Province



1 District
5 Villages



392
Participants



Female Participation

National Law:

Excerpt from Policy Guidelines for the Implementation of Policy on Sustainable Hydropower Development in Lao PDR, Section 5.8 *"In order to safeguard the statutory interests of the project affected people due to resettlement and compensation cases, the hydropower project developer shall provide a progress report on the social impact assessment [and] develop a resettlement and livelihoods' improvement plan, an ethnicity development plan, a gender development plan and so forth before the construction and implementation of the project to ensure any potential negative impacts to the people and other social related impacts are mitigated."* (Ministry of Energy and Mines, Lao PDR, 2015)

International Law:

Recommendations from the Concluding Observations of CEDAW of the combined 8th and 9th Periodic Report of Lao PDR

46(c) *Strengthen efforts to address the factors impeding the political participation of women and adopt proactive policy measures, with sufficient resources, to promote and empower women to participate in political and public life in rural areas, as well as the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local development policies and community projects.*

From 17-21 August 2021, the Gender Development Association conducted gender equality and livelihood development training for 5 upstream resettlement communities impacted by the Theun-Hinboun Power Company hydro-dam project in Khamkhet District, Khammouane Province. GDA used this opportunity to document the experiences of resettled Hmong and Khmu women in water governance. **The aim of this activity was to highlight the impacts of resettlement to their livelihoods, identify coping mechanisms, and gather recommendations to support future interventions that are timely, localized, and effective.** The results were then presented as case studies.

Ms. A (Lao-Tai)

We have water for our households, but not for production. We cannot use the natural river because it is polluted by factories, the gold mine, and the hospital upstream. In the old village, we farmed naturally without chemicals. Now we need chemical fertilizers or the degraded soil will not allow the crops to produce any yield. We also don't have enough land to increase production.

I would request the project support in improving the soil quality and providing enough water for production.

Ms. B (Lao-Pao)

The land is unsuitable and the water is insufficient for production. I cannot plant crops other than cassava. The river is unusable due to pollution from the factory. There aren't any fish or natural food either. Even livestock raising (chicken) was not successful because there was a disease outbreak and they all died.

I would like to request the project for goats because they are easy to feed, and we have suitable land and water too.

Ms. C (Hmong)

I don't have enough labour to generate income for my family. Income from cassava planting is insufficient because there is no market for our crops. Even though we have water for consumption, it is not enough for production. Sometimes there is not enough water for the rice fields. So instead, I help my brother with raising his livestock.

I would like to request the project for cows because they give me more potential for income.

[1] NARUC and USAID, *Practical Guide to Women in Energy Regulation*, "6.3 Case Study: Lao PDR", June 2018: pg.62-69

Recommendations for Partners & Stakeholders

1. Conduct a Gender Impact Assessment to establish an accurate baseline for measuring gender targets. The results should also form the basis of a localized Gender Equality Strategy to guide future activities.
2. Implement measures to integrate ethnicity into all social impact assessment processes, and improve awareness among all stakeholders.
3. Provide capacity-development training for local government partners (provincial and district level), LWU staff, and Village Development Committee on gender-responsive monitoring and reporting.
4. Support community awareness raising activities for Ending Violence against Women. Improve knowledge of the Family Law, as well as reporting mechanisms, justice processes, and services for survivors of violence.
5. Promote women's leadership and agency in decision-making in the household and community.
6. Document good practices and share them with other communities to empower people of all genders as agents of positive change.
7. Continue fostering collaborative partnerships with CSOs and other development partners, to monitor gender-mainstreaming in project cycles and support inclusive, gender-responsive activities.
8. Establish women-led production groups to foster solidarity and enabling environments for women leaders.
9. Increase the number of female project staff in hydropower/infrastructure development companies, and ensure all staff undergo gender training.
10. Support the preservation of ethnic women's traditional knowledge and cultural practices by documenting, sharing, and integrating them into localized activity plans.

