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Local and Traditional Knowledge in Watershed Governance

Diversification of Livelihoods in a Region Impacted by Hydroelectric Development: A Case Study in the Lower Mekong Mun River and Sebok River Thailand

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Images (from top left): Mae showing off her Fishing Trap on the Sebok River, Baan Thalot; Catfish for sale in Baan Don Sumran



Overview of the Project

Local people living along the **Mun River and its tributary, the Sebok River**, have a deep connection to the ecosystem and have longstanding knowledge, practices and norms that are critical to their fishing livelihoods. However, due to **rapid hydropower expansion in the Mekong region**, communities have had to **diversify their livelihoods** in an effort to adapt to the associated ecological and socio-economic changes in their regions. From November – December 2016, 26 interviews were conducted in nine different communities in the Isan region of Thailand in an effort to **better understand historical fishing practices and diversifications that have taken place over the past two decades**. These communities, in particular, have been impacted by the **Pak Mun Dam**, a major dam that blocks fish migration and has had other adverse impacts. This project was conducted in the hopes of providing important details about community diversifications and experiences.

Villages

Residents were interviewed in seven villages along the Mun River, **Baan Hua Hew #11, Baan Hua Hew #4, Baan Na Choom Chon, Baan Huay Mak Tai, Baan Don Sumran, Baan Wangsabang Tai and Baan Kho Tai**, as well as two villages along the Sebok River; **Baan Thalot and Baan Doom Yai**.

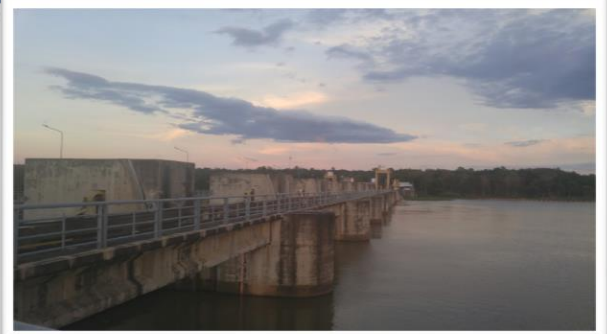
Impacts of the Pak Mun Dam

Local communities were not consulted prior to the construction of the dam and local people protested for years. **Households were displaced and entire communities were relocated due to flooding.** After completion, the most notable impact is the **blocking of fish migration.** However, other impacts such as **loss of rapids/deep pools, high sediment in the river, loss of the riverbank** and more have occurred.

Livelihood Diversifications

Local people have coped with the loss of fishing livelihood by **labouring, owning fishponds, relying on market fish, migrating to bigger cities for work, farming** and more. They can no longer support themselves on fishing alone.

Images (from top): The front of the Pak Mun Dam; People fishing behind the Pak Mun Dam; Fish Ladders



SEASSI Intensive Thai Language Program in Madison, WI

As part of her Thesis Project, Abby attended the **Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute** at the University of Madison, Wisconsin to learn Thai! SEASSI is a two-month intensive language program where students learn to speak, write and read Southeast Asian languages, as well as about the culture and people of Thailand. Learning Thai allowed Abby to communicate with her interviewees and establish a connection through language!





Significance of the Study

The significance of this project is that it draws attention to the voices of those living in communities impacted by the Pak Mun Dam. Since the commission of the dam over twenty years ago, communities have been suffering. While these results are just a snapshot of what is happening in this region, they illustrate some of the diversifications taking place and highlight that diversifications differ from region to region. **The results of this study help to shed further light on these issues, as well as present local narratives surrounding livelihood diversifications.**



Recommendations of the Project

Images (from top left): Fishermen in Baan Doom Yai; Traditional Isan Meal

The majority of the community members recommended **decommissioning the Pak Mun Dam and allow for the opening of the dam year-round**. The main recommendation of this study is to echo the sentiments of community members and have their voices heard. Should that not be possible, opening the dam during times when fish are migrating in larger numbers, such as from mid-May to mid-July. Additionally, **those living along the Sebok River have yet to be compensated for their loss of livelihoods or have their voices heard in a meaningful way**. The final recommendation is to strengthen the communication between government, academics, community members and other stakeholders. **More communication between local people and other stakeholders would likely produce positive results and strengthen relationships.**

“In the future, my grandchildren might not have fish”

-Weera Suriach, Baan Doom Yai

“Take my story and share it with Canada as a lesson”

-Mae Charoen Gong Suk,
Baan Hua Hew #11

For more project information visit our website:

www.trackingchange.ca



Abby with her hosts Mae Lamtian Pinthong and Por Paliwat Pinthong in Baan Don Sumran. They hosted her for 10 days!



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Mae Charoen Gong Suk from Baan Hua Hew #11 sharing her knowledge and discussing the impacts of the Pak Mun Dam in an interview

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