

## A-4 Natural and Cultural Resource and Management 自然、文化資源與管理

Local communities and the Nam Khan Valley project : ecotourism, resettlements or dams . A case study from North Laos Northern

地方社區和 Nam Khan 谷計畫：生態旅遊、遷村或水壩——寮國北部的例子

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In this paper I would like to address several issues link with the current situation of minorities in Laos. The question of indigenous populations in Laos is a bit difficult to deal with as it is the case in many countries of South East Asia. The Nam Khan Eco Valley project will be used as a case study to show the willingness of international bodies to involve local communities in the management of natural resources, while these communities are facing a cruel dilemma: the resettelemtn policy and dams projects.

1995: the town of Luang Prabang, Northern Laos, was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List. It generated projects from bilateral and multi-lateral donors, but also local government. During the last fourteen years, the cooperation programme, under the aegis of UNESCO, set up several pilot projects. All these programs followed the same methodology and aim to ensure a sustainable development through preservation and valorisation of heritage (architectural, natural and cultural) in larger geographic and thematic scale, while controlling linkage between rural and urban areas, and to consider development and environment as associated fields. In this context emerges the Nam Khan Eco-valley project.

The Nam Khan River is one of the main affluent of the Mekong in the province. The watershed is distributed among three Laotian provinces. The upstream area comprises parts of a National Biodiversity Conservation Area, the core protected area is included in the Lao legislation and aims to serve as a biodiversity sanctuary for various threatened species of mammals and birds of international importance.

The main goal of Eco-valley project is to create and to promote management plans

based on pilot areas to protect and manage natural resources for socio-economic development through:

- Sustainable practices which enable populations to fulfil their needs.
- Collective organization for land use and natural resources management.
- Improvement of livelihoods and fighting against poverty.
- Training and awareness enhancement, scientific research activities, environmental sensitization.

The surveys with respect to the future “Nam Khan eco-valley”, and the setting up of a management unit of the site, were used as a basis for eligibility to the UNESCO MAB programme, which stress on protecting natural and cultural environment while creating opportunities for local communities. After several years of talks and meetings, Laos authority eventually withdrew their application to the MAB Programme. Several reasons could be put forward for this move and they will be explored in this paper.

The mission of Eco-valley project team was to identify the needs to develop scientific and technical knowledge in order to set up expertise missions conducted by international and local specialists. I was closely involved, with Lao and international colleagues, in all stages of the project. Two main sectors of the valley were selected and chosen to be the basis of several projects submitted: Nam Khan Ecotourism project, Water supply project, Territorial management and preservation of river corridors project. These projects will be presented briefly in the paper.

An important part of the setting up of the eco valley project was to gain the support and the participation of local communities, both riparian and mountainous, in order to involve them in the project. Unfortunately, if most valley communities were positive about the project the lack of support from the Lao government and threats to their own cultural survival and lifestyle, mainly due to government resettlements policy but also to other external factors for example a Chinese dam projects, placed them in a very difficult position: a cruel dilemma ecotourism, resettlement or dam.