# Laos: Hydropower megaprojects against forests and people

In a letter signed by Aviva Imhof -Mekong Program Coordinator of International Rivers Network (IRN)- as a response to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) regarding the Sekong-Se San and Nam Theun River Basins Hydropower
Development Study, IRN has expressed once again its concern on these megaprojects for Laos. IRN considers that the ADB should focus its attention on identifying and quantifying the impacts of existing or already committed projects, and on evaluating their economic returns to the Government of the host country, rather than proposing yet more dams for the region.

“This is particularly important when one considers the widespread anticipatory logging and resettlement that occurs when a dam site is identified” states the letter. Hydropower projects in countries like Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, China and Laos itself have frequently been preceded by hurried and poorly-monitored logging operations in prospective inundation zones. These kind of practices not only cause an extensive negative environmental impact but also damage indigenous communities, that are displaced from their lands. This way hydropower development can become a tool used by governments to control ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia. Particularly in Laos, current and pending dam projects are being used as cover to evict village people from intended reservoir areas and from upland watersheds.

Additionally local communities never benefit from the logging revenues. The purchase last year of a majority stake in the Xe Kaman 1 hydropower project by a Malaysian logging and property development company is a pending menace for the region, taking into account what has happened in the case of the Bakun Dam in Malaysia, and the depredatory actions of Malysian logging companies worlwide.

Source: International Rivers Network, January 1998.