

BOOK REVIEW

Dead in The Water: Global Lessons from The World Bank's

Model Hydro Power in Laos

Edited by Bruce Shoemaker and William Robichaud

University of Wisconsin Press

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Reviewed by John Barnes

This book will appeal to those concerned with the environment and the influence which construction of dams impacts the wider environment, natural, socio-cultural political and economic.

In Thailand we receive our electrical power from a variety of sources. The bulk of our base load electrical power comes from local thermal power-plants, fueled by natural gas from the Gulf of Thailand and from Myanmar. Peak demand is met from hydro power plants located within the Kingdom (which also serve Thai crop irrigation requirements) and from The People's Democratic Republic of Lao.

This review covers a recently released edited volume on the dams associated with hydropower purchased from Lao and the Nam Theun 2 (NT2) project.

The World Bank had hoped that the NT2 project, unlike its predecessors, would succeed in maintaining indigenous rights and development, sustain fisheries and river-life livelihoods of the displaced, protect wild life, forestry and the commons.

Unfortunately, with sudden unforeseen collapse of the Xe-Pian Xe Nam Noy dam with massive devastation and loss of life in Lao those dreams were dashed.

The book comprises:

A Foreword; Dams and Dreams in Lao PDR by Yos Santasombat.

A Preface,

Acknowledgements,

Abbreviations.

An Introduction; Stepping into the Current by William Robichaud and Bruce Shoemaker.

Part One: The World Bank Promotes A New Model of Hydropower

Chapter 1 Nam Theun 2's Winding History: Studies, Setbacks, Rebranding's

By Bruce Shoemaker and William Robichaud

Chapter 2 Independent Guidance and International Credibility: The Panel of Experts.

By Dave Hubbel and Bruce Shoemaker

Chapter 3 The Promises and Pitfalls of Non-Governmental Organization Consultation and Engagement. By Bruce Shoemaker and Dave Hubbel.

Part Two: Social and Environmental Context and Outcomes.

Chapter 4 Ethnicity in The Nam Theun 2 Theatre: A Sense of History.

By James R Chamberlain.

Chapter 5 Broken Pillars The Failure of The Nakai Plateau Livelihood.

By Glen Hunt, Marika Samuelsson and Satomi Higashi
Chapter 6 Social Change in the Nam Theun 2 Catchment: The Kri Experience.
By N J Enfield
Chapter 7 Elusive Conservation in The Nam Theun 2 Catchment.
By William Robichaud.
Chapter 8 Troubles Downstream: Changes in the Xe Bang Fi River Basin.
By Ian G Baird, Bruce Shoemaker and Kanokwan Manorom.
Chapter 9 Revenues without Accountability: National Poverty Alleviation and Nam Theun 2. By Bruce Shoemaker.

Part Three: Nam Theun 2's Wider Legacy.

Chapter 10 Nam Theun 2 and the transformation of Institutions and Public Debate in Laos. By Sarinda Singh

Chapter 11 Nam Theun 2, The Xe Bang Fai and Thailand's Electricity Network.

By Ian G Bair and Noah Quastel.

Chapter 12 Overpowered: Limiting Liability within Thailand's Nam Theun Electricity Deal. By Grainne Ryder and Witoon Permpongsacharoen.

Chapter 13 Branding Dams: Nam Theun 2 and its role in producing The Discourse of Sustainable Hydropower. By Carl Middleton

Conclusions; Transforming Loss. By Bruce Shoemaker and William Robichaud

Afterword: Bookending Nam Theun 2 By Philip Hirsch.

Bibliography

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The book attracted a packed audience when it featured at a forum at The Foreign Correspondents Club in Bangkok on October 18th. A lively panel discussion at the book launch at ISIS located at The Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University the following morning provided a fitting finale to the event.