

Gnapha Village

Resettlement: From Modernization to Dislocation

WHAT WE LEFT WITH THE COMMUNITY

Our recommendations are based on the idea that redesigning relocation practices according to the concept of transparent and participatory governance will result in a less disruptive process as well as contribute to the process of democratization in Laos.

The **new relocation process** should be based on a continuous collaborative effort between the government, people and possibly NGOs, and should include long term planning, implementation and feed back. The new model of relocation should provide employment and skill training and foster community building in the new locations. Each individual project must include long term monitoring to ensure gradual improvement of the process and applicability to future projects.

• The Research Team



Resettlement Site



Existing Village

THE COMMUNITY

Gnapha Village is located on the banks of the Mekong River several kilometers north of central Vientianne in Laos. About two hundred families call Gnapha home. The village has its own *Wat* (temple) and a very active school attended by children from both Gnapha and several surrounding villages. The local economy consists of several small businesses, a distillery and some small fishing operations, which are primarily used for subsistence. Many of the residents in Gnapha have relocated from other regions of the country in search of jobs or to be closer to family. Most of the residents we met were originally from the Luang Prabang region in the north.

One could say that there are two Gnaphas. The first is a primarily middle class community which consists of permanent structures and fairly well off families. The second consists of poor families living in informal settlements spread along the rivers edge. The informal settlements on the river bank are separated from the middle class residents by a dirt road which was built in the



Many of the homes in the village are in danger of slipping of the river bank.



Many existing shops on the river bank have already been relocated.

late seventies as a means of flood control. Unfortunately, the banks of the river are subject to continuous erosion exacerbated by recurrent elevation of the river due to rain season, threatening the stability of the informal structures on the banks edge. The government has responded to the problem by designing a plan to replace the dirt road currently bisecting the village with a larger paved road. As a result of this plan, many residents of the village residing in informal settlements along the rivers edge are threatened by relocation.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Our research and meetings with the planning officials showed that the problem of displacement extended well beyond the boundaries of one village and was in fact eminent in the city of Vientiane. We conducted interviews in several villages affected by the problem and discovered the following issues associated with the process of relocation:

- a. Lack of communication between the government and the people regarding a timeframe, location and resources available.
- b. Inadequate financial compensation and non-monetary help provided.
- c. Lack of building materials and construction assistance.
- d. Questionable choice of site for a new village farther away from the city and lacking adequate transportation.
- e. Inadequate preparation of the site for new construction including lack of infrastructure such as electricity, water and sanitation.
- f. Lack of access to services, such as schools and medical care.

Our interviews showed that as result of poor planning, people suffered economic, social and psychological consequences. Among most serious ramifications are disruption of livelihoods, environmental degradation and potential public health hazards.

We have recognized that within the framework of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 25.1, which states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

The practice of urban relocation as noted in these villages in Vientiane cannot be considered acceptable.

See also related paper:

Justin Pauly: INVOLUNTARY RESETTLEMENT IN LAO PDR