

# Vietnam: Hydropower Resettlement

## Access to and Control over Resources: Women's Rights Violations in Resettled Communities in Phu Loc District, Thua Thien Hue Province

Construction of the Ta Trach Reservoir forced 3,978 people (Van Kieu minority groups and Kinh people) to resettle to other areas of Phu Loc District in central Vietnam in 2004. They have struggled to rebuild their lives. One resettlement site is a hillside with 20-40% incline. Agreements that each household would be given at least one hectare of land for accommodation and agriculture, as well as some forested land, have not been met 10 years later.

Vietnam's growing energy needs are in part being met by hydropower. In December 2012 Vietnam had 239 hydropower plants in operation; 217 under construction and 658 in planning stages. Aside from impacts on people, 47 of Vietnam's 128 special-use forests have been impacted, with each megawatt of hydropower destroying 62.63 hectares of national park or other protected forest area.

Government bonds primarily funded the Ta Trach Reservoir project, which permanently occupies 3908 hectares. The Reservoir generates 21MW of power, provides irrigation to plain areas and prevents small floods downstream in the Perfume River system.

### Effects of Resettlement on Women

Before the Ta Trach Reservoir, communities were affected by small floods, early floods and the major flood season. This was part of life by the river. Men and women worked jointly to grow rice and vegetables, fish, and meet their needs.

**Loss of Livelihood:** Unstable income, low income, inability to grow sufficient food. People's farming skills are not relevant or functional in the rocky, inclined, and poor quality soil. People work as day labourers on big farms – poorly paid and infrequent work. Men migrate for work, leaving women in care roles and dependent on remittances. Some women walk 3 hours/day to cultivate old land, knowing hydropower plant authorities may release water and drown crops.

**Dependence & Loss of Status:** Not contributing regularly to family income, women are dependent on men's earnings (men are favoured and paid more). Women are seen as unworthy of sharing decisions about how to spend money.

**Domestic Violence:** Hardship has led to domestic violence in many families. Community associations have been created, but only on paper. Women do not receive benefits due from authorities.



Resettled people lack income to build shelter and continue to live in temporary houses like this one in Phu Loc hamlet.

### About the Research Programme

The feminist participatory action research for this brief was conducted by the Centre for Social Research and Development (CSR/D) from August 2012–July 2013 in Phu Loc District. CSR/D worked together with resettled women in 5 hamlets, who established a Women's Union and invited the district's female deputy of the Dept of Justice to teach them how to write a complaint letter.

This research is part of APWLD's FPAR Programme in 8 countries.

### Profiles of the Resettlement Communities

*Phuc Loc Hamlet* is 45km from the city of Hue. 75% of the mostly Van Kieu minority are classified poor or near-poor. Not suitable for livestock, the hillside site has between 20-40% incline, and streams are unreliable, leaving the community without water. Many families are still in temporary houses. People here and in Ben Van sites work in corn & cassava fields or strip timber, for which women earn 120,000vnd/day (30,000 less than men).

*Ben Van 1,2,3,4 Hamlets* (35 km from Hue) do not have widely available government social services. Officials are not sympathetic to requests for assistance. **All** people in the four hamlets are classified as poor and near-poor.

## CSRD & APWLD Rural and Indigenous Women Claiming Rights: Vietnam

### Women's Experience in Resettlement and Advice

*In the old land, my family had nearly three hectares of productive land. Here we have no productive land area at all... I do not know what to eat.*

—Woman in Ben Van 4 Hamlet

Women's message to others facing resettlement: *You should express your opinions before you are resettled. What is promised by the investor, you should consider carefully. If they promise that they will grant you land, you should see that land before you agree to move. You should also carefully consider how you can make a living in the resettlement area...*



Meeting to write complaint letters, Ben Van 1 Hamlet, Loc Bon Commune, Phu Loc District, 16 January 2013

### Compensation Not Received

Negotiations about resettlement were limited to brief meetings between government authorities, hydropower investors, and a small number of men (not women) from the community. Community representatives were inexperienced, lacking understanding of their rights to negotiate an agreement to compensate the community adequately for the loss of their traditional life and livelihood.

On 4 December 2001, the Chairman of Thua-Thien-Hue Province People's Committee approved a package of compensation. Equivalent to 9 million USD, the compensation was to provide the resettled people with productive land, property equivalent to what would be lost, and appropriate support to re-establish their economic and socio-cultural lives to at least the level at their original site. 10 years later their quality of life is low, with significantly lower livelihood earnings.

The project management board agreed that each household would be given at least one hectare of land for accommodation and farming, as well as some forested land. The resettled people are waiting for the nearly 1,000 hectares of land they are "owed".

### Complaint Procedures Inaccessible and Ignored

In Phuc Loc hamlet, 80% of women are illiterate. In Ben Van hamlets, the percentage varies from 20 to 25%. Government authorities will only investigate complaints, if they follow lengthy procedures, as prescribed in Vietnamese law. The preparation and submission of written documents is essential.

Other forms of complaint and protest such as demonstrations or strikes will be suppressed by the authorities, and participants will be punished.

Women affected by Ta Trach initially protested and a few wrote letters about losses in resettlement. The women and their complaints were ignored. They have recently resumed efforts to ask authorities for change (see picture above).

### Changes Required/Policy Recommendations:

The resettled women affected by Ta Trach Reservoir put forward the following as issues that must be satisfactorily addressed:

**'Owed' land:** More land given to households would them to grow crops, with which to feed their families and sell excess for income.

**Job skills and agriculture training:** The community knows the land will not support the plant varieties they grew on riverbank land; however, they desperately need knowledge of what will grow productively. Broom-making skills are also needed, to take advantage of local bamboo and rattan.

**Financial assistance for a community fund:** Creation of a community fund would make loans available to individuals and families to establish businesses.

**Local high school:** Government authorities are requested to establish a high school in the local area. High school age children must spend hours travelling by bus to the nearest high school daily. This is prohibitive, and most children do not complete secondary education.