

research snapshot

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We need to improve our understanding of natural resource development and its impact on the developing world



What is this research about?

In Laos, there is a wave of investment into the land and natural resource sector. These changes have brought on social and environmental sustainability issues. There are growing concerns that:

- A majority of the commercial resource development projects are not effectively regulated
- Resource concessions have negative outcomes for communities in Laos. Many depend on local environmental resources for their livelihoods.

Agribusiness and hydropower development were some of the factors that created these issues. This was examined by looking at a community in central Laos.

What did the researcher do?

Dissertation fieldwork was done looking at resource sector investment and local development in Laos. The researcher did ethnographic work at the village level. The research was conducted in partnership with:

What you need to know:

Institutions for governing land development in developing countries need to be more democratic and accountable. There is a current global boom for resource commodity exploitation, which raises concerns. How are community property rights legally recognized in resource development projects?

- The National University of Laos (NUoL)
- A Canada International Development Research Centre (IDRC) capacity-building project in Laos
- The York Centre for Asian Research.

What did the researcher find?

The researcher found that there are problems with the management of resource sector investment in Laos. These problems are closely linked to the limits of governance in Laos. Resource development projects also come with externalities. An externality is a negative side effect from an economic activity. For these projects, many externalities

overlapped and affected one another. Also, there was an interplay between the social and ecological impacts of agribusiness and hydropower projects. This created complex social and environmental problems.

These problems had an effect on rural poverty and the environment. Better approaches need to be developed to understand and manage cumulative social and environmental impacts. The impacts should be looked at across different resource sectors and extractive industry projects.

How can you use this research?

This research may help with the way that cumulative social and environmental impact assessments are done. It gives ideas on how to improve policy and regulation for dealing with complex environments in developing states. This is especially helpful for those with limited institutional governance. The findings should be of interest for people that work in the fields of:

- Extractive resource sector governance
 - Community-based resource management
 - Rural poverty
- Corporate social and environmental responsibility in Southeast Asia

Other groups that would find this research useful are:

- State planners
- Resource companies
- International and national non-governmental organizations
- Research organizations

About the researcher

Keith Barney is a Doctoral Candidate with the Department of Geography at York University. He has also worked as a Policy Analyst with Forest Trends, the Rights and Resources Initiative, and the Centre for International Forestry Research. This Research Snapshot is derived from his dissertation research, entitled **Grounding Global Forest Economies: Resource Governance and Commodity Power in Rural Laos**. The paper is published as "Laos and the Making of a 'Relational' Resource Frontier". *Geographical Journal* 175 (2) (2009): 146-159.

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