
[Laos: Villagers aware of the threat of industrial tree plantations](#)

Tree plantations are a growing problem worldwide and this is particularly clear to people living near the plantations. For instance, the Chief of Xiang Khai sub-district of Xaibouli district, in Laos, says: "Eucalyptus plantations are causing forest, soil and water resource degradation. I do not want anyone to grow any more eucalyptus trees in my sub-district."

In Laos, industrial plantation forestry is being promoted in some villages. This is mainly through the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-supported Plantation Project. In the most recent form of this project, a private company with majority New Zealand ownership --BGA Lao Plantations-- has been granted concessions to develop eucalyptus plantations on 50,000 hectares of land in central Laos (of which only a small amount has so far been planted). At Ban Nao Neua, in Xaibouli district, villagers reported that 100 hectares of their dry dipterocarp forest area was destroyed before being planted with eucalyptus in the mid-1990s. The ADB Plantation Project supported the eucalyptus planting.

Villagers observed that the forest resources that they used to depend upon when the area was covered with natural forest could no longer be found in the eucalyptus plantation. ADB consultants tried to reassure the villagers that their plantation would not cause soil fertility problems, but locals remained sceptical. The foreigners with the project could not speak the Lao Language, and the villagers reported that they were not able to clearly express their concerns to them. Finally, when the ADB suggested that villagers convert more of their land into eucalyptus plantations, the villagers refused and they have not planted any additional eucalyptus on common lands since then.

Another concern is that forests managed as commons by communities will be replaced with privately-owned industrial tree farms, thus marginalizing the poor and disadvantaged groups in society who previously relied on these commons resources for their livelihoods. For example, some of the eucalyptus plantations established by Ban Manilat villagers are situated near Ban Palay, a largely ethnic Brou village in Xiang Khai sub-district. Wild mushrooms are one of the most important sources of cash income for villagers in Ban Palay, and the best areas for collecting mushrooms are in the dry dipterocarp forests that are beginning to be converted into eucalyptus plantations.

Article extracted from "The people and their river: The Xe Bang Fai River Basin, Lao PDR", by Bruce Shoemaker, Ian Baird and Monsiri Baird, in Watershed, People's Forum on Ecology, Vol. 7, No. 3, March-June 2002. For more information about industrial tree plantations in Laos see