
[Thailand: Local people resist dams](#)

Dams are one of the most important causes for forest and agricultural land destruction, which usually goes together with the loss of their land by local communities caused by forced displacement. This unsustainable model is applied worldwide, from South America to Asia. Thailand is not an exception.

On March 23, five thousand people from eight different groups affected by existing dams, planned dams, and land rights issues united in a struggle for justice by seizing the Pak Mun Dam in Ubon Ratchathani Province. This dam was chosen because it has provoked and continues to provoke serious negative environmental impacts on the people of Isarn in North-East Thailand. For a long time villagers have been suffering fresh drinking water shortage. They set up a temporary village on the left bank of the Mun River and decided to remain in the place until their demands have been met. The activists are part of the Assembly of the Poor, a coalition of Thai peoples' movements to fight for the rights of the people to participate in the country's environmental and development policies.

Their most urgent demands are focusing on the solution to two specific problems: the drastic reduction in the number of fish in the Mun River, which affect the livelihoods of 3080 families since dam construction, and health problems such as a 50% increase in the incidence of intestinal fluke, an unknown increase in the incidence of liver fluke, and a potential spread of schistosomiasis from snail vectors inhabiting the reservoir. Demonstrators also demand land compensation of 15 Rai (2.4 acres) per family for the lost fisheries income.

Dams are nowadays a widespread problem all over the country. Sirindhorn Dam, also situated in Ubon Ratchathani Province, is damaging 2526 families, which have received no compensation since the dam was built in 1969. Lam Can Chu Dam, in Chayapum Province, is responsible for the loss of natural forest areas, which provided the villagers with food and income, for water shortages downstream due to the storage of water in the reservoir and river channelization, and for the lack of an irrigation system in the downstream areas. Additionally, the Royal Irrigation Department has never paid compensation to the peasants for the loss of their land, fruit orchards which resulted from the building of the dam. At the same time villagers in Amnat Charoen Province are demanding land compensation for the resettlement that followed the flooding of their lands by Huai Pai Dam. In relation to the projected dams of .Phrong Khun Phet in Chayaphum Province, and .Phrong Khun Phet in Ubon Ratchathani Province, root based organizations are demanding that they are definitively shelved.

Source: Aviva Imhof, South-East Asia Campaigns, International Rivers Network, e-mail: aviva@irn.org, 26/3/99, 5/4/99.