



Call for Contributions - Right to Adequate Housing

The Tai, known as Thai in Vietnam, is an indigenous people living in northwest Vietnam. They are generally subsistence farmers growing mainly rice and vegetables. They rely heavily on buffalo to plow their fields. For centuries, they lived along rivers and creeks to grow wet rice. The Black River, which runs through the middle of the country, was considered the main artery of the Tai Country. On this life-line river, the Hoa Binh hydro-electric dam was built in 1994; Son La dam in 2011; and Lai Chau dam in 2015. These three dams are classified as the three largest dams in Southeast Asia inundating the most land previously occupied. These dams also generate an income of 1+ billion USD/year for the Vietnamese government, which the Tai never see. Consequently, the Tai had to move from inundated plains to the hills and mountains. To survive, whole forests were razed to build houses and to create terraced rice fields. These terraced fields made rice growing exponentially more difficult.

While most of the benefits of the dam projects assisted urban areas and lowland farmers, problems generated by the projects fell mostly on the displaced people, who faced many difficulties in setting up their new lives. The compensation given to the displaced people were far from enough to enable them to settle in their new locations.ⁱ

With little to no compensation from the government for being displaced, the people had to build their own homes by cutting down whole forests. This affected their access to electricity, water, and medical care, further widening the socioeconomic gap.

This development project was created without free, prior or informed consent from the communities that were being affected.

Right to adequate housing means nothing if there is no right to ancestral/agricultural lands or to basic services. Basic services include water, electricity and sanitation. Adequate housing means access to livelihood, education, and healthcare, which the Tai currently do not have

Plans for adequate housing must involve inputs from the stakeholders or stakeholders' representatives by the Tai people themselves. We also request that stakeholders will be able to form their own committee without Vietnamese government representatives involved so that they can truly decide what's best for themselves.

ⁱ Dao, Ngo. (2010). Dam Development in Vietnam: The Evolution of Dam-Induced Resettlement Policy. *Water Alternatives* 3(2): 324-340. <https://goo.gl/khAZ1y>