The Dams at the Mekong and the environment at the region

Source: Stratfor.com

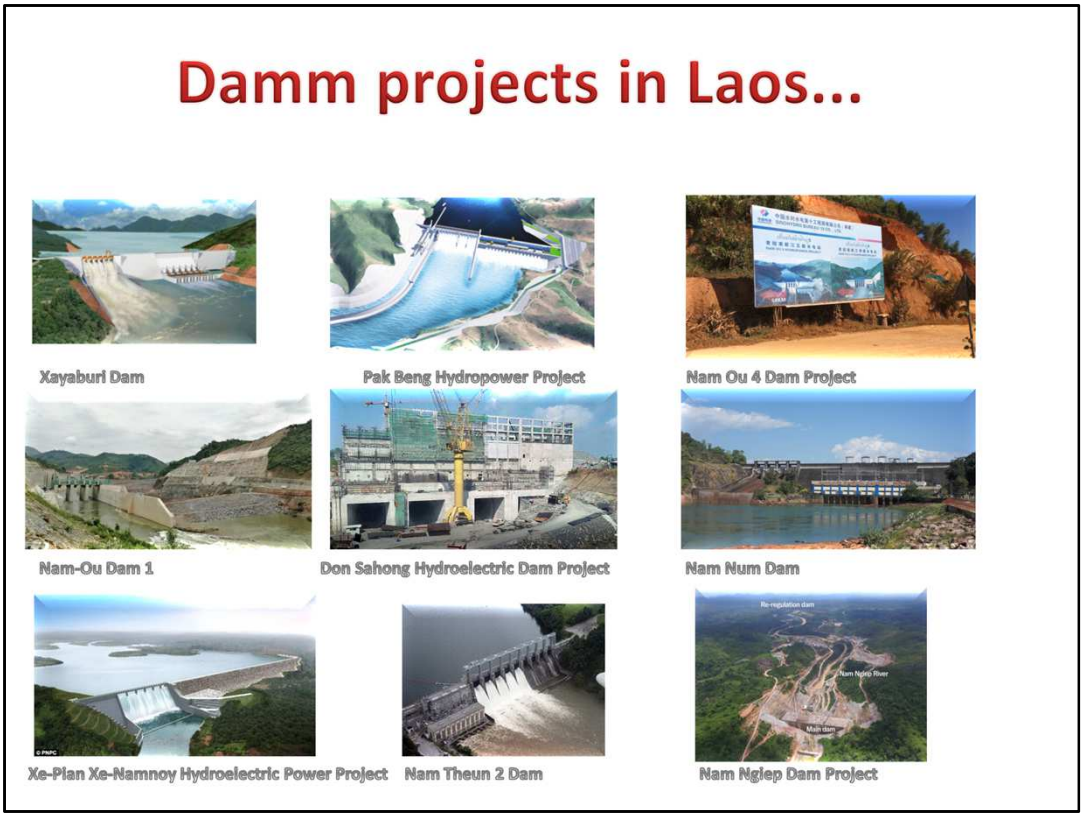
Report by the Alliance for Democracy in Laos

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished delegates

The ASEAN community is an advocacy group that wants to solve their problems across borders, so also the problem of energy supply. Sustainable energy supply, which is also Co^2 neutral, is one of the major goals of the ASEAN countries signing the United Nations SDG Agreement. Thus, the Mekong, as one of the largest rivers in Asia has become the focus. The Mekong is the lifeline for over 56 million people in the region. With the source in China, he goes through the countries Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and most recently Vietnam.

But instead of protecting the Mekong as a lifeline, some countries in this region have severely damaged the lifeline in recent years. The most controversial dam projects of recent years are the dams in Laos.

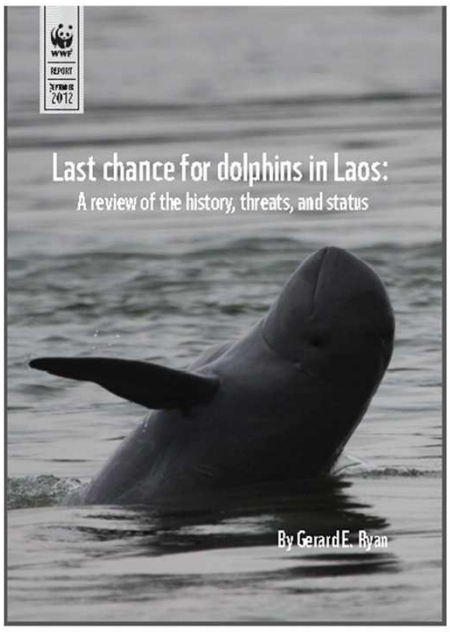
Laos is with its many dams along the Mekong one of the largest electricity producers in Asia. Nevertheless, a large part of the population is without electricity. According to official information, this affects about 25% of the population. Development workers and independent NGOs expect at least 30%. This is all the more surprising given that Laos claims to produce 1.9 GWh with its hydroelectric power plants.



160 dams in the Mekong region are planned. China has already built eight and planned eleven more. In Laos itself, there are currently 46 dams and 54 other projects. By 2020, a total of 100 dams are to be completed. Most of these dam projects are located in the tributaries, 11 of which are planned directly on the Mekong, 3 are under construction, for the fourth has already signed the contract. Electricity accounts for about two thirds of the country's exports. Laos has neither the technical expertise nor the resources to build the dams themselves. In the past two years, two dams in Laos have already been broken.

The dam projects in Laos are mostly financed by foreign direct investment and built by private companies. As a rule, the private companies get the rights to use the hydropower plants for 25 to 30 years before they become the property of the Lao government.

Environment Problems



The dams on the Mekong are seen as a threat to the diversity of animals and plants. The Mekong is a cohesive ecosystem that not only supplies fish to millions of people, but also supplies the South Vietnamese Mekong Delta, known as the rice chamber of Southeast Asia, with water and fertile sediments. The dams split up this ecosystem. Studies show that fish stocks will decline by up to 40 percent if all the dams on the Mekong River are completed as planned. This is about the food security of the densely populated region. There are also other follow-up problems, such as forced resettlement and wasting money through corruption.

On July 23, 2018, there was a repeated dam failure in the province of Attapeu, in the south of Laos. During the night of July 23, 2018, the unfinished dam of the US $ 1.02 billion Xe Pian Xe Namnoy hydropower project collapsed after heavy rains. Officially, there are only 39 dead, but it is doubted by the population. The misfortune was therefore predictable in our view, especially since this is not the first disaster of this kind. Almost three dams have been broken until now. So in 2016 the SeKhaman in the Sekong province, already on 11.09.2017 the Nam Ao dam in the province of Xaysomboun at the Thathom area was broken after heavy rains, on July 22 2018 the Nam Beng dam near the city Pakbeng, province Oudomaxay.

Inadequate compensation

Flood Disaster after Dam Colapse 2018

According to our information, the government paid the victims of the last catastrophe 100,000, - Lao Kip per month as compensation. This sum is equivalent to U$ 12, -. For the survivors of the dead a sum of 1.700.000, - Lao Kip was paid; this corresponds to a sum of U$ 200, -. This is all the more surprising as there have been large sums of international aid payments. Unfortunately, the government of Laos is concealing the exact sum of all aid payments from abroad. Furthermore, it is confirmed by locals that the relief supplies are poorly distributed. For example, relief supplies are stored in various warehouses. But instead of distributing these relief supplies, the needy people have to pick up these goods there. As a result, many needy people receive no relief supplies. In addition, we have reports from locals that $ 10 million in aid was misappropriated for normal road construction. Significantly, since the disaster, entry to Laos has been severely restricted for journalists.

Flood disasters



In addition to the dam burst, flooding of other rivers has led to floods in 15 of 17 provinces leading to a catastrophe in 2018.

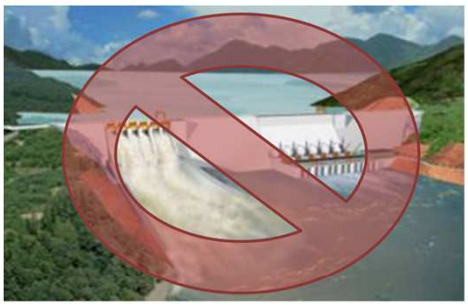


These floods were caused by bad ecological planning of the dams.

In August and September of 2018, massive floods occurred in Laos. Affected by this disaster were the following provinces: Attapeu, Bolikhamxai, Champasak, Houaphan, Khammouane, Luang Namtha, Louangphabang, Oudômxai, Savannakhét, Vientiane, Vientiane Capital, Xaignabouli, Xiangkhouang.

These floods were triggered by heavy monsoon rain. The massive deforestation of recent decades, as well as the uncontrolled dam construction, which has mixed up the groundwater level, has favored this disaster. While in 1975 70% of the Laos area was covered by rainforest, in 2018 it is only 40%. In addition to the logging by dam construction and other projects, there are still illegal loggings by Vietnamese companies. This in turn is possible because of the ongoing corruption in Laos.

Which solutions are there?



Since these are cross-border problems, a single entry of a single country is not the target. The non-interference policy of ASEAN is out of place here. The goal must be that all riparian states work together with citizens and nongovernmental organizations. The concerns of the citizens must be heard. We see that such a large number of dams is not necessary. Rather, other green energy sources must be used, such as solar energy and wind power. But this energy production must also be well planned and environmentally sustainable.