Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Author: Laurent Romagny
Head of Mission
Action Contre la Faim Laos

Email: acflaos@laopdr.com
and acf-laurent.romagny@libertysurf.fr
Tel: (856-21) 35 26 69 / 70
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Introduction (1)

Majority of the country is mountainous and many villages remain very isolated and poor.

National rural development policy aims at poverty reduction, which objectives, are:

- **Eradicating opium** production by 2005;
- **Eradicating slash and burn** cultivation by 2010, with a target of a decrease of 50% by 2005;
- **Poverty reduction** by 2010, and a decrease of 50% by 2005;
- **Education for everybody** by 2020, or scholarship for all the children, at least three years after primary school.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

**Introduction (2)**

Village consolidation and resettlement is an important element to achieve these goals.

This above approach is seen as the ‘only cost-effective way of making services available’.

It is also viewed as an instrument to stabilize and eventually abolish shifting cultivation and eliminate poppy cultivation.

Therefore moving villagers has been exposed as a good option to fulfil rural development objectives.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Rational

Such a theory leads to an identification of displacement as an ideal strategy for development and rural planning.

However, reserves can be expressed on the implementation of this strategy.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

**Point of View of Villagers**

Villagers are generally happy with their lives and their occupation.

It does not mean, that they would not grasp the opportunity to change their lives to the better.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Point of View of Villagers (2)

Information on resettlement plans has generally been poor.

- Each of the villages has different stories to tell
- Villagers ready to be resettled are conditioning their displacement by the guarantee to see an improvement of their living conditions.
- In some cases, the community will not wait for the authorization of the district but just even move before in order to reserve land.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

**Positif aspects of village resettlement**

- **In Language & Education**
  - Increasing of people who claim to **speak Lao**.
  - Attendance to **school** seems to be **higher**

- **In Health**
  - Better circulation of advisory **information**
  - Better access to medicines and vaccinations

- **In Economic activities**
  - Rapid integration into a market economy
  - Increase of domestic goods and equipment
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Negative aspects of village resettlement (1)

Years after the resettlement are characterized by:

- a brutal degradation of the living condition of the population involved.
- Increased food and rice shortage,
- high incidence of diarrhoea, malaria, respiratory diseases, …
- and social and cultural breakdowns
- Resettlement also involves decapitalization, both financial or in kind
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Negative aspects of village resettlement (2)

Higher Mortality rate

As part as our project, surveys have been carried out, in order to:

– *Estimate the mortality rates in Long district in the last 5 years*

– *Evaluate the evolution of the mortality following the implementation of the resettlement plan of upland villages toward the lowlands*

The results are compared with

- the *national* mortality rate (1.4% / year);
- the “serious” mortality rate (3.5% / year);
- the “alarming” mortality rate (7% / year).
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Negative aspects of village resettlement (2)

Higher Mortality rate

Results:

Average mortality rate (% / Year) for the last 5 years for each category of villages:

- Lowland villages: 0.8
- Upland villages: 2.3
- Resettled villages: 4

Diagram showing the comparison of mortality rates among different village categories.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Negative aspects of village resettlement (2)

**Higher Mortality rate**

**Results:** Mortality rate by category of village

![Graph showing mortality rate by category of village](image-url)
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Negative aspects of village resettlement (2)

**Higher Mortality rate**

*Distribution of years per class of mortality and typology*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Year:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resettled</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upland</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowland</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Blue: <1,4
- Dark Red: >1,4 & <3,5
- Light Grey: >3,5
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Negative aspects of village resettlement (3)

- **Land Conflict**
  
  Availability of land suitable for paddy cultivation remains a crucial issue

- **De-capitalisation**
  
  In many cases villagers lose their capital (cash or animal) to face the resettlement problem

- **Proletarian class**
  
  Resettled populations often turn to low-paid wage labour
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Conclusion

Displacement has the reverse effect from the initial plan to these populations.

Instead of poverty reduction, displacement is jeopardizing and impoverishing ethnic minorities that it has targeted.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

**Note / Remark**

“Stabilisation of shifting cultivation and eradication of poppy cultivation” does originally not mean resettlement.

“Village consolidation and services delivery” does not necessarily mean resettlement in lowland.
Recommendations (1)

To remind that
- under specific conditions – slash-and-burn agriculture is a sustainable practice and is not dangerous for the forest.

Effort has to be made to provide highland villages with access to services.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?  

Recommendations (2)

In case of resettlement, initiatives should be implemented before the displacement and continue for many years:

1. Appropriate means for the respect of the conditions of the populations before, during and after displacement are mobilised and provided,
**Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?**

**Recommendations (2)**

In case of resettlement, *initiatives* should be *implemented before* the *displacement* and *continue for many years*:

2. All *engagement* taken with the *population displaced* is *granted prior to the displacement* of the village,
In case of resettlement, initiatives should be implemented before the displacement and continue for many years:

3. The resettled population is accompanied with:

- **Provision of assistance** during the first year of their installation,
- **Long term support** to their transition and integration in their new livelihood during the time needed for their reinstallation.
The national objectives show its willingness to implement a sustainable development policy.

Nevertheless, the strategies operated to reach these objectives are detrimental to socio-cultural development, one of three pillars of development in NPEP.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Recommendations & Conclusion

Sustainable livelihoods development policies, particularly the ones concerning upland areas, should be explored and promoted.

These development strategies would constitute alternative to option that would lead to displacement; preventing all the negative consequences.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Recommendations & Conclusion

When resettlement is unavoidable or requested, a government policy aiming at protecting health and livelihoods of population concerned must be adopted.
Resettlement: an alternative for upland development?

Thank You for Your Attention

By Laurent Romagny