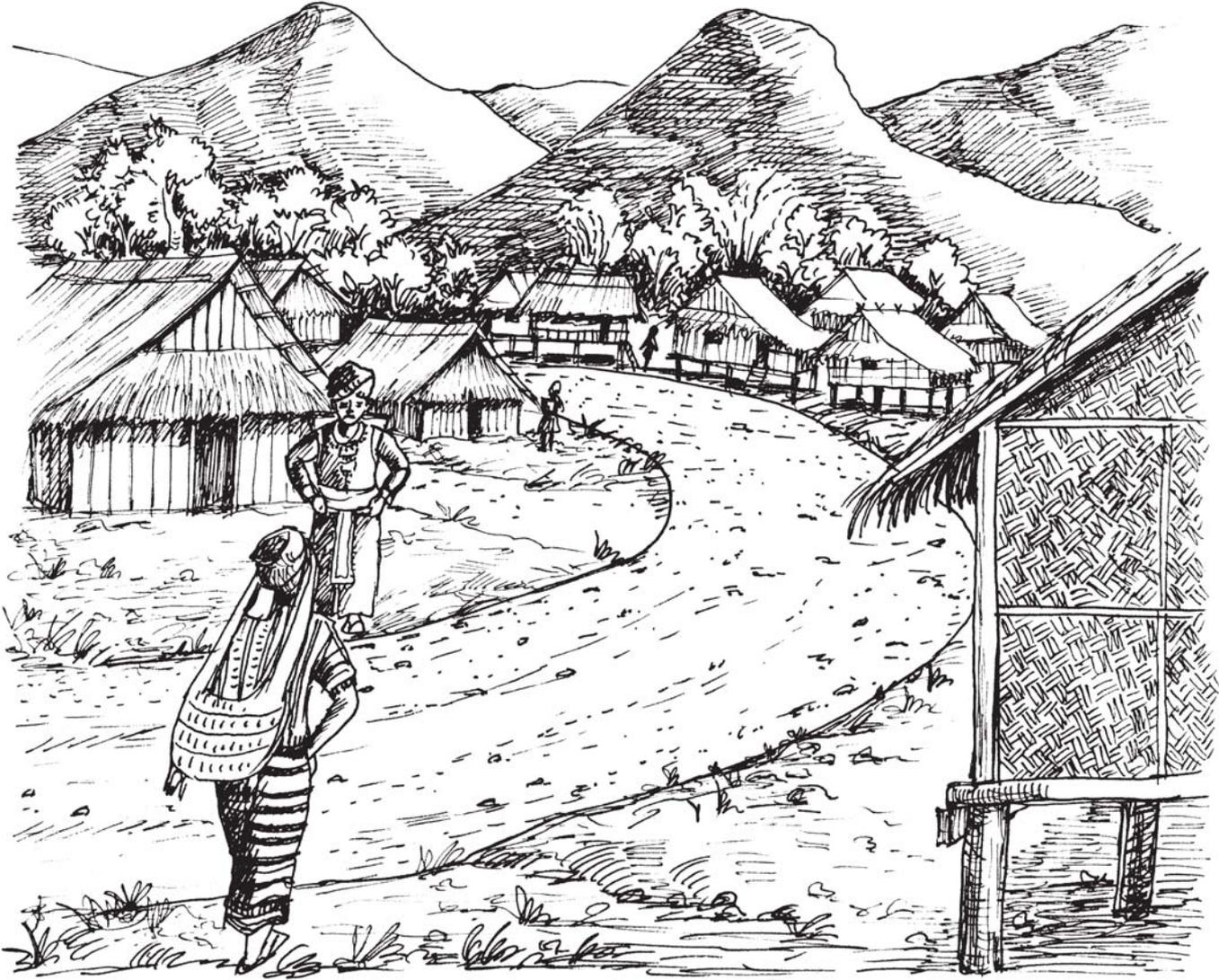


# Issues from Village Relocation



Relocating people from isolated highland villages to more accessible areas forms part of the national policy to eliminate shifting cultivation and opium production and eradicate poverty. In Phonxay District of Luangprabang Province, the district authorities have introduced programmes to consolidate or merge relocated villages to provide better infrastructure and government services.

Research in study villages has so far indicated that the merging of villages, while having some desirable outcomes, is giving rise to a range of land use, social and livelihood problems. This is especially so when different ethnic groups such as Hmong and Khamu are consolidated into one village. The Lao-Swedish Upland Agriculture and Forestry Research Programme (LSUAFRP) has been working in close cooperation with district authorities to identify problems that have arisen and provide suggestions on land use planning procedures to ameliorate the adverse consequences of relocation.

The parties affected by relocation programmes are:

- The district agencies entrusted with implementing relocation.
- Those relocated from highland villages (in this case ethnic Hmong).
- The inhabitants of the villages to which relocatees are moving (in this case ethnic Khamu villagers).

## Objectives of land-use research on relocation

1. To better understand the institutional, land-use and social issues and their causes.
2. To understand future farmer livelihood strategies in order to cope with relocation.
3. To propose potential solutions.

### The Phonxay District Relocation Programme

The programme for relocation and village merging in Phonxay District aims to reduce the total number of 72 villages in the district to 41 villages by the year 2005. This involves the movement of 11,472 people.

The plan is not supported by any livelihood or land-use analysis and leaves much of the responsibility for relocation with the communities themselves. In study villages the plan includes the relocation of a total of 180 Hmong families from Pha Toup Tai, Phou Soong Noy and Pha Cha Norm to the new roadside village of Huay Maha.

## Issues identified from studies on relocation

The issues surrounding relocation in general are of three types:

- *Institutional issues* arising from programme implementation.
- *Land-use issues* arising from concentration of populations.
- *Social issues* caused by merging villagers of different ethnic groups.

### The institutional issues are:

- *Limited district resources*: the district lacks adequate staff and budget to provide the infrastructure required for relocation on the scale outlined in the plan.
- *Ambiguous agency roles*: relocation and land allocation programmes are managed and implemented by different district agencies, i.e. the District Administration and DAFO respectively. Concentrating populations creates land allocation problems for the DAFO.
- *Limited dialogue*: there is limited dialogue about perceptions and strategies between concerned agencies and village authorities when preparing relocation plans.

### The land-use difficulties in Phonxay are:

- *Less fallow land to rotate*: most original Khamu families have fewer plots of agricultural land to use because new settlers have acquired numerous parcels.
- *Little or no land*: some of the recent arrivals have only one parcel of land in the new location, i.e. they have not been able to claim adequate land in their new location.
- *Land quality*: as agricultural land becomes more limited, some families have to choose less fertile agricultural land.

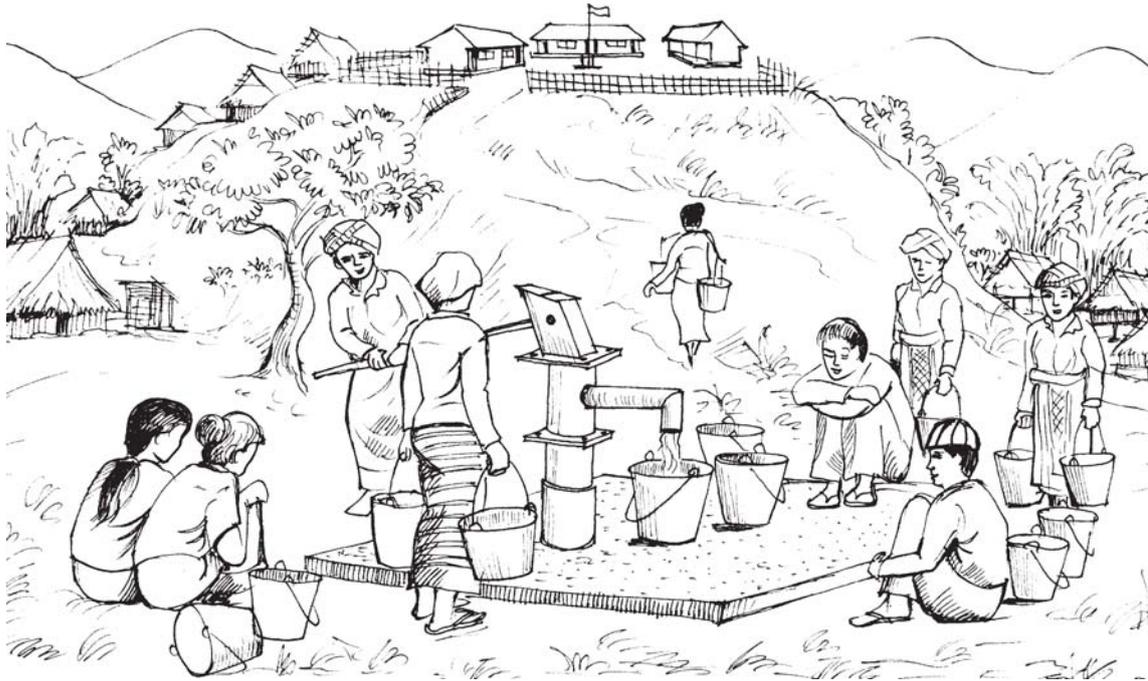
- *Land borrowing*: new settlers borrow land and pay the land tax to the Land Office instead of to the owner, with the aim of establishing claim to the land.
- *Land sub-division*: Khamu farmers have adopted practices such as the sub-division of parcels and crop rotations as an alternative to plot rotations. Villagers referred to this as *prayat din* (saving land), which may involve continuous cropping for three years on one parcel of land.
- *Weeds*: *imperata cylindrica* grass has started to infest cropping fields.
- *Vacation of allocated land*: to date about 121 ha of allocated land has been vacated by 26 families who have migrated out. About half of the land allocated by DAFO in 1997/98 has been acquired by Hmong families.
- *Distance from farming land*: Khamu families are now further away from their farming lands since they were moved to the 'New' Huay Maha village site.
- *Cattle mortalities*: there were eight cattle mortalities when Hmong families first moved to Huay Maha, where there is very

little grazing land; the animal losses were valued at 6,400,000 Kip.

#### **The social problems in Phonxay include:**

- *Population increase*: in 1997/98 Huay Maha/Poung Pao had 58 families with a population of 337. By the end of 2002 the number of families had risen to 92 with a population of 647.
- *Human mortalities*: the mortality rate of Hmong settlers in Huay Maha, particularly children, increased beyond normal levels after they moved from higher elevations: nine deaths in the last two years.
- *Vacating houses*: when Khamu families moved from Poung Pao to 'new' Huay Maha they had to vacate their houses in the old village and build new houses.
- *Water supplies*: the Khamu abandoned the permanent water supply at the old site for an incomplete supply at the new site.
- *Housing land*: Hmong settlers are occupying housing land vacated by the Khamu.
- *Schooling*: the new temporary school at Huay Maha is inadequate.





## How do land-use issues arise?

### Government programmes

The issues are linked to and influenced by three government programmes being implemented by district authorities:

- *The Focal Site Strategy and Village Consolidation Programme*: this is the cornerstone of the government's rural development policy. It is officially viewed as a necessary means of reducing shifting cultivation. It specifies that a village unit may comprise no fewer than 50 families.
- *Opium Cultivation Elimination Programme*: differing interpretations and application of the policy at district level have resulted in the relocation of opium-producing villages to lowland areas in preference to undertaking alternate *in situ* development.
- *Shifting Cultivation Reduction and Alternate Occupations Programme*: this programme aims to stabilise shifting cultivation, stop indiscriminate logging,

and regenerate forests through the adoption of permanent land-use systems, preferably in lower-lying areas.

## Villager perspectives

### Expected benefits from relocation

Representatives of the Hmong settlers indicated they would derive the following benefits from moving to Huay Maha:

- *Access to land*: access to adequate and suitable land for livelihoods.
- *Transportation*: road and transport access.
- *Markets*: access to markets to buy and sell commercial commodities.
- *Health services*: improved access to health services in roadside locations.
- *Education*: better educational opportunities for their children at the new location and access to higher education elsewhere.
- *Clean water*: access to better domestic water supplies at the relocation site.

## Solutions proposed by villagers for overcoming land shortages

Few of these anticipated benefits have yet materialised. In answer to the most pressing problem facing them, Huay Maha villagers proposed the following solutions to overcome land shortages:

- *Village boundary*: expand the village boundary of Huay Maha to include upland areas in the old Hmong village areas.
- *Land reallocation*: exchange land between the villagers of Huay Maha, Ban Pa Toup, Phou Soong Noy and Cha Norm so that families have some plots adjacent to the road and other plots in the management areas of their old villages.
- *Livelihood strategies in 'far fields'*: plant crops such as upland rice, maize and Job's tears in the old village areas where soils and climatic conditions are more favourable, and raise goats, cattle and buffalo in areas further away from the road.
- *Livelihood strategies in 'near fields'*: plant permanent commercial crops such as fruit trees and NTFPs and undertake fish pond husbandry.

- *Access tracks*: pool labour to improve the walking track to the highland areas so that horses and farm tractors can transport produce to the main road and markets.

## Addressing the issues

### 1. Where relocation has occurred or is occurring

The advocated approach is based on assessing the carrying capacity of lands available to the existing and projected population, both in the 'host village' and in the areas from where people have been relocated. This involves consultation with district authorities to formulate possible solutions to identified problems.

### 2. Preventative measures when relocation is being considered

Village relocation continues to occur in the highlands, and the consequences of this policy could be improved for all concerned if some mitigating measures were included in relocation plans.

### Process of assessing the consequences of relocation and formulating possible solutions to identified problems

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Activity 1:</b>  | Gather secondary data from district authorities and target villages   |
| <b>Activity 2:</b>  | Verify populations and population trends in villages where relocation is occurring  |
| <b>Activity 3:</b>  | Verify and map existing village boundaries of host villages and adjoining relocating villages   |
| <b>Activity 4:</b>  | Calculate agricultural land available in host' and 'neighbouring' villages  |
| <b>Activity 5:</b>  | Approximation of carrying capacity of the available land in both the host village and neighbouring villages   |
| <b>Activity 6:</b>  | Identify future farmer livelihood and land-use strategies with representative farmers from each of the villages concerned   |
| <b>Activity 7:</b>  | Assess land requirements based on projected populations and livelihood strategies   |
| <b>Activity 8:</b>  | Expand the host village boundary to include enough land for the projected population (may involve incorporating all host and relocating village land in 1 village area) |
| <b>Activity 9:</b>  | Undertake agriculture and forest land zoning using appropriate zoning criteria  |
| <b>Activity 10:</b> | Prepare Land Management and Use Agreements for the expanded host village management area  |
| <b>Activity 11:</b> | Undertake land re-allocation for relocated and original residents   |

Conclusions arising from action research	
Issue	Conclusions
<b>District development strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Re-orientate the strategy so that it is not bound by programme targets but is appropriate to the limited availability of staff resources and funds</li> <li>● Reduce the size and rapidity of relocation programmes to match the limited district resources</li> <li>● Introduce on-site community planning and alternate development approaches in shifting cultivation and opium cultivation villages</li> </ul>
<b>District rural development planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase villager participation in planning to ensure that village livelihood objectives and strategies are incorporated in village land-use and development planning</li> </ul>
<b>Land management at district level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthen inter-agency planning of land management programmes</li> <li>● Build improved land management planning capability at district level</li> </ul>
<b>The village merging and relocation programme</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Re-think relocation targets and timing</li> <li>● Consider alternatives to relocation, i.e. the construction of access tracks and small rural roads with villager assistance to enable villagers to retain production areas near old village sites</li> <li>● Integrate the development of forest and land management agreements with access road construction</li> <li>● Undertake the planning, costing and funding of infrastructural development and the provision of services at roadside locations prior to relocation</li> </ul>
<b>Population growth and land demand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Undertake population growth projections and arable land area availability calculations when planning village consolidation</li> <li>● Reconsider the present criteria of merging small settlements to achieve 50 families per village near roadsides because it isolates villagers from production areas, restricts production and livelihood potential in the hinterlands</li> </ul>
<b>Village livelihood considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consider villager strategies, coping mechanisms and livelihood options when village merging is being planned</li> <li>● Provide access to production land for commercial crops within reasonable distance of village sites, and provide larger village production areas</li> </ul>
<b>Rights to land</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure equitable allocation of adequate arable land to original residents and new settlers and provide land tenure entitlements in agreed production areas</li> <li>● Engage villagers in land redistribution and land re-allocation to ensure that host village families are not being disintegrated by the influx of new settlers, and that new settlers receive fair allocations</li> </ul>
<b>Village land-use agreements and inter-village networking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prepare village land-use agreements with villagers after land re-zoning and redistribution, to encourage inter-village cooperation in agricultural land and forest management and use</li> </ul>

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This paper is adapted from: "Village land-use and livelihood issues associated with shifting cultivation, village relocation and village merging programmes in Phonxay District, Luangprabang Province" in *Poverty Reduction and Shifting Cultivation Stabilisation in the Uplands of Lao PDR: Technologies, approaches and methods for improving upland livelihoods*. NAFRI 2005.

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