



Mekong Watch Fact Sheet Rasi Salai Damⁱ

Project Name: Rasi Salai Weir (Rasi Salai Dam)
Location: Rasi Salai District, Srisaket Province

Project Outline

The Rasi Salai Dam was completed in 1993 in the middle Mun River Basin for irrigation purposes. As a part of the Kong-Chi-Mun Water Diversion Projectⁱⁱ, the dam was built under the direction of the Department of Power Development and Promotion (DPDP), Ministry of Sciences, Technology and Environment, Thailand. It is currently operated by the Royal Irrigation Department of Thailand.

Project Costs

The original budget for construction was 140 million bahts, but the cost has risen by a factor of more than six to 871 million bahts. In addition, unforeseen compensation payments continue to be made.



The Rasi Salai Dam

Environmental and Social Impacts of the Dam

The area around the dam construction site has distinctive environmental conditions under the influence of the monsoon, being highly arid for half of the year during the dry season, while during the rainy season, it undergoes flooding for three months, with about 600 km² of wetlands and inundated forest. The villagers call it *Pa Bun Pa Tham*, and use it for farming, fishing, pasturage and gathering of wild plants and animals. In ancient times the area was a part of a sea, and has a vast underground layer of salt deposits. The people here have long engaged in salt production, gathering the salt that seeps up from these deposits underground.

Prior to the dam's construction, the villagers had heard from a government agency that a moveable rubber weir was to be installed, so they were not opposed to it. What was actually built, however, was a concrete dam. The reservoir behind the dam inundated 100 km² of land, but

because this was before environmental assessment regulations came into effect, no survey was performed beforehand. The dam's construction caused many of the villagers to lose opportunities to practice rice farming or other occupations using wetlands. Furthermore, the irrigation facilities had not been completed by 1993 when the dam began impounding water, so the villagers did not obtain the new irrigation for their fields. According to Thai NGOs, the inundated wetland area was 100,000 *rai*ⁱⁱ, and irrigation was planned for an area of 34,000 *rai*, but actually only 10,000 *rai* received irrigation. An estimated 15,000 or more people lost farmland due to the reservoir, and salt damage has also occurred due to salinization of the dam's impounded water. One hundred fifty of the villagers' traditional salt works were located in the area flooded by the dam, and can no longer be used.



Pa Bun Pa Tham (Rainy Season)



Traditional Salt Works (2002 photo)

The *Pa Bun Pa Tham* is also important as spawning grounds for fish that migrate up the Mun River from the Mekong. The Pak Mun Dam, which was built around the same time at the mouth of the Mun River, blocked the fish's migration up from the Mekong River, and in addition, the Rasi Salai Dam destroyed their spawning grounds. The combined effects of these two dams are thought to have had a huge negative impact on reproduction of Mekong River fish. Furthermore, inundated forest ecosystems have extremely high biodiversity. The aquatic flora and fauna, birds and other things living there appear to have been affected, but as mentioned above, no environmental assessment was done, so the details are unknown.

The *Pa Bun Pa Tham*, with an abundant complex ecosystem, provides various natural resources for the livelihoods of the local inhabitants. However, because the ecosystem is deteriorating due to the effects of the Rasi Salai Dam, these villagers face an unsustainability crisis with regard to their livelihoods, and the inheritance by subsequent generations of knowledge on how to use these natural resources is threatened due to changes in the environment.

Villagers' Movements

Opportunities to engage in various occupations have been lost in the wetlands affected by the dam, so the villagers have begun seeking compensation. The government, however, suspects the villagers to have no official right to use the lands they had been traditionally using, and they have not met the villagers' demands. For that reason, some of the villagers joined the "Assembly of the Poor," a nationwide villagers' movement network, and began negotiating with the government. In August 1999, about 2,000 villagers erected huts by the dam's reservoir and began demonstrating. On that occasion, the villagers demanded not only the compensation they had been asking for up until then, but like the villagers around the Pak Mun Dam downstream on the Mun River, that the dam gates be opened and the ecosystems of the Mun River and the *Pa Bun Pa Tham* be restored. The Thai government opened the sluice gates of the Rasi Salai Dam in 2000 for two years and conducted studies. In a cabinet decision in 2004, however, it opted to continue using the dam but open the sluice gates for four months each year. The villagers continued demonstrating after that, and in 2009 a committee was formed for mitigating the environmental and social impacts, with the government agreeing to include a representative from the villagers in it. In addition, compensation for the farmland was approved not only for the villagers participating in the Assembly of the Poor,

but also for several other villagers' groups, with a total of seven compensation payouts made. The total amount of compensation awarded as of February 2013 was 1.886 billion bahts (equivalent to about U.S.\$57.87 million at the current 2016 exchange rate).

【References】

Living River Siam. "Basic information about Rasi Salai dam"

http://www.livingriversiam.org/3river-thai/rs/rsd_info_e1.htm

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(Sanan Chusakun. "Reality at Rasi Salai '*Pa Tham*,' Womb of Isaan's Rivers." (in Thai))

<http://e-shann.com/?p=2182>

ⁱ Initially it was called a "dam," but due to growing opposition from the affected villagers, they began calling it a "weir." Currently, official documents refer to it as a weir.

ⁱⁱ It was promoted in the 1980s as a means of relieving water shortages in northeastern Thailand. Under this water diversion plan, 13 dams were to be built on the Chi and Mun rivers over the course of 42 years, with dams ultimately to be constructed on the Mekong River. Due to strong opposition from the villagers and turmoil over compensation negotiations, the project has stalled, but the Thai government is hinting at promoting it again in 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ A unit of area in Thailand, 1 Rai=0.16ha.