

# **Intersecting Risks, Intensified Vulnerabilities:**

**Development-Induced Displacement & Resettlement,  
Indigenous and Ethnic Minority Women,  
and Sex Work in the Lao People's Democratic Republic**

By  
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## **Abstract**

### **Intersecting Risks, Intensified Vulnerabilities: Development-Induced Displacement & Resettlement, Indigenous and Ethnic Minority Women, and Sex Work in the Lao People's Democratic Republic**

By Meaghen Beth Simms

Abstract: This thesis explores the little-understood links between development-induced displacement and sex work in the Lao PDR. Over the last two decades hundreds of thousands of Indigenous and ethnic minority people have been displaced and resettled without adequate planning or support for rehabilitation. The result has been broad impoverishment on an economic, social and cultural scale, with damning effects and unique influences on young women. At the same time, the nature of sex work in the country has also been evolving in potentially dangerous ways. “Intersecting Risks, Intensified Vulnerabilities” offers important insights on how the individual impacts of resettlement intersect both with each other and with known influences on migration to lead resettled women into sex work, while also reflecting on the risks they subsequently face in the sector. Is based on five months of research that took place in 2006 through a feminist, inter-cultural and inter-generational lens.

August 30, 2010

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## Acronyms/Abbreviations

ACF	Action Contre la Faim
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFESIP	Acting for Women in Distressing Circumstances
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CEDAW	Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DIDR	Development-induced displacement and resettlement
FHI	Family Health International
FSS	Focal Site Strategy
GAFM	Gender and Forced Migration
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoL	Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International non-governmental organization
Kip	Laotian currency ( <i>in 2006 10,000 kip = \$1USD</i> )
km	Kilometre
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LFAP	Land and Forest Allocation Program
LSFP	Lao Swedish Forestry Program
LWU	Lao Women's Union
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MOLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
NTFPs	Non-timber forest products
OD	Operational Directive
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commission for Human Rights
OP	Operational Policy
PSI	Population Services International
SPCRD	State Planning Committee and Leading Committee for Rural Development
TRACE	Trafficking from Community to Exploitation project
WFP	World Food Programme
WIFM	Women in Forced Migration
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNIAP	United Nations Inter-Agency Programme on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNIS	United Nations Information Service
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USD	United States dollars
USDOS	United States Department of State



# **Intersecting Risks? Intensified Vulnerabilities?**

It was one of those moments I thought would stay with me forever, that morning in November 2000, and as I took a snapshot with my eyes I kept them closed against the view in hopes of searing its image into my mind.

I was in the middle of my first visit to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and was on a slow boat on the Mekong River, looking out over mist-covered hills as local women collected water along the shore. In a misguided moment I had bought Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* to read along the way, but had quickly cast aside its complexities and was letting myself be lulled by the calm and contentment I thought defined the country and its people. Life was simple, I told myself, in the way of so many travelers, all too quick to romanticize what we didn't understand.

That image has blurred in the years since. The slow boat was, looking back, both too fast to see what was really happening in Lao PDR and not fast enough to keep pace with the change the country was undergoing as its Communist leaders steered it on a course toward economic growth, integration with the market and ethno-centric nation-building; and the mist in my memory has become more of a shroud that veiled the ensuing exodus from the hills as upland Indigenous<sup>1</sup> and ethnic minority Peoples were resettled *en masse* in the name of "development" to mixed, consolidated communities in the lowlands or

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, the term "Indigenous" is not in the official lexicon of the Government of Lao PDR. As such, for much of this thesis I will use the language of "ethnic minorities" in discussions relating to the country, except in reference to rights-based recommendations in the conclusion.

roadside areas — roads that at the same time were bringing their own changes, and were becoming ever more bounded by beer shops and other commercial sex venues as the country opened its arms and borders to regional trade.

Neither sex work nor resettlement are new in Lao PDR, as the following chapters will detail, but both have been evolving in destructive and increasingly interconnected ways in response to the “development” agenda of the state and the tremendous upheaval it has created in the lives and livelihoods of the country’s Indigenous and ethnic minority citizens.

Nonetheless it is a connection that has been overlooked in all but a handful of local and global studies of development-induced displacement and resettlement (DIDR). In the rare instances that sex work is even acknowledged as an outcome of resettlement, it is usually an ill-understood addition to a long list of its impoverishing effects and attendant vulnerabilities; and while appreciation for the complexities of DIDR, and its potential to create unintended consequences, is growing — along with recognition of the disproportionate vulnerability of Indigenous Peoples and women — insufficient attention is still being paid to the nuanced realities within these high-risk groups, which are determined (among other distinctions) by ethnicity, class and age. These oversights are not merely academic; they have real implications for future planning and preventative measures that could help to mitigate unsafe migration and ongoing sex work-related vulnerabilities in resettled communities.

The need to know more is particularly acute in Lao PDR, where as many as one-fifth to one-quarter of the country’s population — primarily Indigenous Peoples and ethnic

minorities — have been relocated under recent resettlement programs, and at a time when women and girls from these same groups are also increasingly present in the sex sector.

This thesis attempts to enhance understanding of how the individual impacts of ill-planned and ill-implemented resettlement on young Indigenous and ethnic minority women and their families intersect — both with each other and with known influences on migration — to lead resettled women into sex work in Lao PDR. In doing so it will necessarily draw on resettlement theory *and* sex work theory, based on recognition of the gaps in existing knowledge on DIDR; but more critically it fleshes out existing theory through primary interviews with researchers, development practitioners, United Nations officials and representatives of government agencies, before bringing to the foreground the untold perspectives and experiences of young resettled sex workers themselves.

These interviews reveal the complexities of DIDR in the country and have underscored that resettlement does not take place in a vacuum. As Mohanty (2003) stresses, “cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes” (223). Through resettlement, the contexts in which Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities in Lao PDR find themselves have become decidedly more complicated — most had been, to varying degrees, geographically, economically, socially, culturally and linguistically isolated from the mainstream prior to displacement — and vulnerabilities have been introduced and exacerbated for young women on a variety of levels. Consequently, I also consider it imperative to assess, as a secondary line of inquiry, if and how young resettled women are less prepared to defend their rights than

their non-resettled counterparts, and thus are at greater risk of exploitation in the sex sector.

To these two ends this thesis details the pre-displacement, post-resettlement and post-migration lives of a small group of resettled service women, as sex workers are locally known. It is based on five months of preliminary research that took place in 2006 and an extensive reading of the literature, and was born of a belief that simple explanations or solitary causes are not sufficient to explain migration when diverse women are impacted and when the changes imposed by resettlement are so entwined and all-encompassing.

The result is a richly descriptive “history of time” that provides both a baseline against which to measure the depth of change experienced by young women in consolidated communities, and an array of grounded evidence on physical, economic, social, cultural and environmental experiences and vulnerabilities; this will enable an interlocking analysis of the routes that have led them from resettlement to sex work and the risks they have encountered since.

It is guided by Razack’s (1999) theory of interlocking oppressions, specifically race, class, and gender oppressions. She argues that:

“Interlocking systems need one another. In tracing the complex ways in which they help to secure one another, we learn how women are produced into positions that exist symbiotically but hierarchically. These complex operations of hierarchies of gender and race... illustrate the central importance of understanding how various systems interlock to produce specific effects.” (Razack 1999:13)

Thus, wherever possible, reactions to resettlement are situated within the context of class differences and gendered biases, obligations and responsibilities. Also, recognizing that different ethnic minorities in Lao PDR have diverse capacities to cope with societal disruptions (such as those imposed by displacement and resettlement) and at times polar

propensities to migrate (da Silva<sup>2</sup> 18 June 2006), this thesis also makes every attempt to distinguish between the experiences of service women from different ethnic backgrounds, despite the small sample size. In the end six in-depth interviews were undertaken with resettled service women, and shorter interviews with another seven. In recognition of the limits of that sample and of the vastly different realities experienced by resettled women and girls the world over, its aim is not a universalizing meta-analysis, but a localized and grounded analysis.

As will be obvious from the language of this thesis, I believe that resettlement should be prevented wherever possible, especially when Indigenous and Tribal Peoples are involved. This is required by international law and best practice. Whether displacement is an inevitable consequence of national development or avoidable is hotly debated (Muggah 2003:9, 11-12). In Lao PDR much of the conservation/development-induced displacement of the last two decades could have and should have been avoided; and by doing so, lives, traditions, societies and cultures would have been spared. Yet with demands for hydropower, minerals and metals showing no signs of abating, and with the government's international obligations unanswered, it is clear that some forms of resettlement will continue for the time being. As Cernea (2000) explains, it is in its implementation that the principle of the “‘greater good for the larger numbers...’ is often abused and turned into an unwarranted justification for tolerating ills that *are* avoidable” (12). It is my hope, therefore, that this research will inform responses to future resettlement and rehabilitation efforts among those previously displaced.

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<sup>2</sup> *Not his/her real name.* Lula da Silva is a researcher working on Lao PDR.

What I will not do in this thesis is engage in a moral debate about the value and viability of sex work as an occupation. It is an exceedingly complex issue and one on which I have no concrete position, as sex workers come from a range of backgrounds and can experience polar conditions in the sex sectors of their respective towns, cities or countries. I strongly believe that this is a position shared by most who have studied or interacted at length with sex workers.

Many observers view the sex sector in Lao PDR as a much kinder, gentler version of the industry in Thailand, where trafficking is common and a high-volume, low-cost trade is entrenched. However, it is not free from exploitation, as evidence emerging from this and other recent studies will show. Although young resettled women clearly exercised a measure of agency in choosing to migrate, they did so in a context that for some was characterized by confusion, uncertainty or deceit; that for all was made amidst a severely delimited choice of alternatives as a result of the land, livelihood and other constraints imposed by resettlement. And as this thesis will show, choices continue to be constrained long after relocation, so threaten to transform sex work from a short-term way to finance an alternate future to the *sole* future available to many young women.

Similarly, while adaptation features prominently in the language of the thesis, conceptualizing migration as “positive adaptation” must be considered with caution, as empirical evidence from this research shows that it is both a combination of action and reaction, agency and impact, opportunity and lack of opportunity, informed and uninformed choices, free will and the influence of others. And despite the attempts of some theorists to define “adaptation” in set terms of conservatism followed by risk-

taking, which has some possible resonance in the delayed timing of migration, the responses of others, along with those of the core participants in this study, raise questions about “adaptation” as a linear process, particularly amidst concerns that conditions in some resettled communities are worsening years after relocation, and amidst uncertainty about the years ahead.

Clearly the story of resettlement is far from over in Lao PDR. State-sponsored displacements for “development” are continuing despite clear land shortages in the lowlands, as is resettlement to make way for mining, plantations and other industrial developments. With that *caveat* in mind, this thesis relates the lives *to date* of six young resettled sex workers, and through their stories the knowledge necessary to truly understand their decisions to migrate and their treatment in the sex sector. Its intent is equally to contribute to the development of theory on the impacts of resettlement on migration and sex work, as it is to offer insight to and encourage future research, programming and policy interventions. Feminist research demands no less (Mohanty 2003).

It is organized as follows:

Chapter One broadly examines global literature on development-induced displacement and resettlement from gendered, inter-generational and inter-cultural perspectives, with a view to understanding how its individual and cumulative impacts may make young, Indigenous and ethnic minority women vulnerable to migration that ends in sex work.

Chapter Two explores the economic and development agendas that the Government of Lao (GoL) has used to legitimize mass resettlement, and challenges to achieving those

agendas with due consideration for ethnic diversity and diverse gender rights, roles and responsibilities. It then details existing knowledge on the experience of development-induced displacement and resettlement in the country, with particular emphasis on its extensive and often impoverishing impacts, and a range of outcomes that have included increases in supply and demand for sex work.

Chapter Three provides essential background on sex work in Lao PDR and the potential evolution of a more exploitative sector, while situating the choices of young women to migrate that have ended in sex work or trafficking. Crucially, this chapter addresses the shortcomings in the DIDR literature, and sets the stage for a more targeted analysis of risk factors that may be exacerbated by resettlement.

Chapter Four presents the histories of a select group of resettled service women. It consecutively tells the story of resettlement starting with their lives in the uplands, through displacement and resettlement, and into sex work, with special attention to the economic, social and cultural challenges and changes they encountered along the way.

Chapter Five uses an interlocking analysis approach to illustrate how the impacts of resettlement have intersected with each other, and with more mainstream influences on migration, to lead resettled Indigenous and ethnic minority women into sex work. It further discusses the vulnerabilities they have encountered within the sector and those that they and other resettled youth may face as a result of the legacy of resettlement on future livelihoods. Chapter Five concludes with a number of targeted recommendations for integrated research and resources that could help mitigate both present and pending risks related to resettlement and sex work or trafficking in Lao PDR.

# Mapping the Road Most Traveled: Development-Induced-Displacement and Resettlement in Theory and Practice

The association of resettlement with war and natural disaster has been widely recognized over the last century; and today, images of destitute women and children crowded into makeshift camps reach the world's news readers on a near-daily basis.

What is less well known is that increasing numbers of people are also being relocated, in the name — at least ostensibly — of development, and that the consequences of development-induced displacement and resettlement are hardly less impoverishing.<sup>3</sup> In fact, according to Rajagopal (2002), “most large forced<sup>4</sup> dislocations do not occur in conditions of armed conflict or genocide, but in routine, everyday evictions to make way for development projects” (qtd. by Robinson 2003:1). Between 1980 and 2000 an estimated 200 million people were displaced worldwide by development (Cernea 2000:11); and with industrialization, urbanization and demands for electricity intensifying, the number of projects that will cause displacement is expected to climb further still (Cernea 1996:300).

As evidence of its scale has grown, so too has realization that the impacts of DIDR are

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<sup>3</sup> While DIDR has been marginalized within the larger study of forced migration, a number of theorists have concluded that both conflict- and development-induced displacement share common risks (Leckie 2002:20) and that whether motivated by natural disaster, conflict or development, the outcomes may be “comparably dire” (Robinson 2003:3). Because of these commonalities I will borrow from the refugee discourse where necessary and relevant.

<sup>4</sup> In DIDR the distinction between forced and voluntary displacement is not often obvious and Muggah (2003), along with others, warns that “what may be treated as ‘voluntary’ in rhetoric can actually be ‘involuntary’ in practice” as a result of the use of violence, coercion, ethnic persecution, inducements or restricted choices (7, 10; Van Hear 1998 cited by Robinson 2003:5). Individual households also represent a grey area and Scudder and Colson (1982) suggest that within families women may have no choice but to move (285). Conversely young people, perceiving new opportunities, may be more open to resettlement (Koenig 2006:111).

immense. Study after study has testified to its impoverishing impacts and has done so in the strongest of terms. Robinson (2003) underscores its “catastrophic” potential (4). Turton (2002) stresses that for both individuals and communities displaced by development, the consequences are frequently “disastrous” and impact “economic, physical, psychological and socio-cultural well being” (50). Even the World Bank (1996) has concluded: “the cumulative effect is that the social fabric and economy are torn apart” (78).

Amidst this turmoil and transformation the risks to Indigenous Peoples (Cernea 2000:31, Bartolome et al. 2000:6) and women are especially profound (ADB 2003:1), and in some instances may motivate new migration along a radically different route — one that ends with sex work (Colson 1971:131; Mensendiek 1997:168; Ekachai 2002).

In this chapter I examine the existing literature on development-induced displacement and resettlement from gendered, inter-generational and inter-cultural perspectives, with a view to understanding how the individual and cumulative impacts of DIDR may make young women vulnerable to migration that ends in sex work. This review, while not exhaustive, broadly presents the context and conditions of DIDR experienced globally under three main sections: The first section gives an overview of the modes and motivations of DIDR, including the disproportionate targeting of Indigenous Peoples; introduces distinctions that should be considered in assessing theoretical insights on gendered realities and reactions to DIDR to date; and discusses policy and planning failures that have allowed impoverishment and vulnerabilities to flourish in the wake of resettlement. Section Two identifies the main physical, economic and socio-cultural impacts of DIDR, particularly as experienced by women of different ages and Indigenous

or Tribal Peoples; where useful this review also relates impacts on young men, which may be relevant in settings where gender roles differ. Section Three presents evidence on how women have adapted or reacted to resettlement, including how new influences impact livelihood and lifestyle choices that lead to migration and sex work.

## **Section One: Overview**

### **Modes, Motivations and Minorities**

Despite the very real threat of broad impoverishment and unintended impacts, DIDR is typically excused by governments and some donors as necessary for national growth, nation-building, modernization and development (Turton: 2002: 48, 50, 62, 64), based on the belief, Koenig (2006) argues, that “the greater good justified some loss” (105). The slate of national development interventions with displacing effects is long, but includes large infrastructure projects like hydroelectric dams, transportation corridors, irrigation systems and mines.

Conservation concerns have also resulted in relocation, with evictions enabled through the imposition of legislation limiting the use of swidden or shifting cultivation<sup>5</sup> and restrictive forestry laws (Kaur and Raj 1990:181) or the curtailing of community access to natural resources in and around newly created protected areas (Dasmann 1976:301).

Finally, DIDR has been encouraged as a way to strengthen community development and ease the state’s provision of services to isolated populations (Cernea 1993:391;

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<sup>5</sup> Swidden cultivation is practiced on sloping land and is present in two forms — rotational/shifting and pioneering. The more common, rotational, involves the cutting and burning of plots, which are then planted and farmed for a year or two before long fallow periods. In pioneering cultivation, plots are farmed continuously until they are exhausted.

Kammerer 1988:7).

However, critics like Cernea (1993) have challenged official justifications that invoke community development, and the displacement they generate, as “politically motivated operations disguised by authorities under a ‘development’ rhetoric” (391); and De Wet (2006) insists that rather than being “consciously planned as a development exercise,” DIDR frequently “becomes reduced to relocation... with resettled people left to find ways of generating their own livelihoods.” Consequently, the result is usually impoverishment, not development (De Wet 2006:187).

Moreover, it is all too often the poorest who are most at risk of being displaced, as they are typically marginalized from the state on multiple levels: from their meager contributions to the national economy, to isolation owing to geography, ethnic otherness and the absence of political representation in the mainstream. This is especially true for Indigenous or Tribal Peoples (Robinson 2003:10-11; Turton 2002:50-51).<sup>6</sup>

In these contexts DIDR has been used to bring about wide-reaching economic, socio-cultural, ideological and political transformations. Vandergeest (2003), for instance, underscores the perceived political importance of modern states having “jurisdiction over a bounded territory” and notes that governments have used land allocation, which is almost always tied up with displacement, to consolidate control over this territory (48).

Researchers challenge that resettlement — far from a function of benign bureaucracy — becomes a struggle for economic rights to the rich forest, mineral and oil resources of more

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<sup>6</sup> The disproportionate risk to Indigenous or Tribal groups has been recognized by a number of DIDR researchers (Downing 2002:11; Kaur and Raj 1990:181), including Fernandes (1995), who revealed that 40 per cent of those displaced in India between 1955 and 1995 were Tribal Peoples — this despite the fact that they made up only 8 per cent of the larger population (1).

remote regions, such as in Indigenous territories (Nietschmann 1985:192).

DIDR also often confers control over the residents of that territory (De Wet 2006:184), especially amidst efforts to modernize. Chambers (1969) called this process “planned social change” through “population movement, population selection and most probably population control” (qtd. in Muggah 2003:10); and Robinson explains that the early development strategies determined by modernization theory were designed to transform “traditional, simple, Third World societies” in order to accelerate take-off. “If people were uprooted along the way,” he says, “that was deemed a necessary evil or even an actual good, since it made them more susceptible to change” (Robinson 2003:10). One desired change that has driven displacement is the cessation of subsistence and swidden agriculture in favour of commercial farming, which is in turn subsidized by the transformation of those being resettled into a ready pool of cheap labour (Vandergeest 2002:48; Ng 1999:81; Muggah 2003:13).<sup>7</sup>

Yet the impacts of DIDR on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples have at times been so harsh that Nietschmann (1985) chose to dub the process “state expansion by nation destroying” (192). This destruction stems not just from the loss of economic resources in traditional territories and physical impoverishment in resettlement sites, but from the irretrievable loss of cultural heritage in resettled Indigenous communities (Nachowitz 1988, cited in Kaur and Raj 1990:182).

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<sup>7</sup> Ideological cum security arguments have also been employed to gain control over remote populations (Nietschmann 1985:192), as was the case in Thailand in the 1960s and 1970s when resettlement was fueled by fears that the inaccessibility of the “hill tribes” made them “susceptible to communist and insurgent influences” (Gilligly 2004:120-121).

## **Gendering DIDR Realities and Reactions**

Together with Indigenous Peoples, women have also been singled out for their vulnerability post-resettlement, and the World Bank has recognized that both “may be less able than other groups to reconstruct their lives after resettlement” (*Involuntary* 2004:71).

Yet as is made clear by theorists of the Gender and Forced Migration (GAFM) approach, the reactions of women to resettlement are far from universal. Recognition of diverse realities and reactions of resettlers is relatively new and it is only since the 1970s that the fate of displaced women has really begun to be acknowledged. The Women in Forced Migration (WIFM) approach first called for women to be centrally considered in the context of forced migration and has since influenced research and discourse; even so, practical gains have largely been limited to recognition in institutional charters of risks to women — protections that have not been sufficiently implemented in practice. WIFM has also drawn criticism for its failure to focus on aid to promote women’s participation in long-term development, post-resettlement (Indra 1999:17-18).

For some, WIFM evolved into the Gender and Forced Migration approach, adherents of which challenge generalizing household and other assumptions in research and practice, and advocate for more comprehensive and situation-specific understandings of the diverse experiences of displaced women and men. To this end, GAFM promotes research that considers class, ethnicity, culture and other differences, such as age and religion (Indra 1999:18-19, 21; Torres 2002:3).<sup>8</sup>

Understanding the diverse experiences of displaced women is especially useful in

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<sup>8</sup> Due to the difficulties facing researchers using the approach, including around accessing sufficient local data, the widespread adoption of GAFM methods has been a challenge (Indra 1999:19-20).

clarifying misconceptions of the supposed benefits of DIDR. Associated gains for a few have included the provision of health, education and other resources (El Jack 2006:77); but research has shown that benefits from resettlement often may not “trickle down” to women and can depend on such factors as education and skills training, socio-economic status and pre-existing or exacerbated gender or social inequalities within the household and larger community (Scudder and Colson 1982:283; Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:7-8, 20); and although gendered divisions of labour can become more equitable post-resettlement, these adaptations in behaviour occur most often when the entire economy is expanding and bringing with it new opportunities (Koenig 1995:32, 39). The more common view is expressed by Chambers who argues that: “There have been cases where [women] have benefited... but such cases are exceptional” (qtd. in Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:10). Most adversely affected are those women with the least amount of power, such as Indigenous women or female-headed households (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:10; Colson 1999:25).

Differentiating DIDR experiences by age also reveals important variations in gendered responses, as the reactions of young people often reflect a unique blending of the novel and the negative. While the World Bank highlights the risks to resettled children, who lack both a voice to effectively articulate their concerns and “the legal, political, and economic capacity to protect their own standards of living” (*Involuntary* 2004: 81-82), others report that youth have played more active roles in some resettlement sites or refugee camps, where for instance, young women may have differing interests and greater access to opportunities than their mothers (Hart 2002:4; Koenig 2006:120; Picciotto et al. 2001:34). Notably, young people remain an understudied population in the context of DIDR.

Ultimately, the resilience and rehabilitation of women of all ages comes down to the context into which they and their families are resettled (Scudder and Colson 1982:283), a context that is determined in large part by “how the ‘landing cushion’ has been prepared” and implemented (Ng 1999:85). The following pages highlight the inadequacy of that cushion in most cases of DIDR.

## **DIDR Protections, Planning and Implementation**

Despite growing knowledge of the severity of impacts, research has demonstrated that state-led implementation of resettlement is frequently dangerously flawed, and that international protections are inapplicable, insufficient or ignored;<sup>9</sup> and as a testament to the recklessness that has marked DIDR in so many nations, Cernea (2000) notes that most “do not have an explicit policy for involuntary resettlement” (44) and may actually choose “to maintain a policy vacuum rather than issue norms and legislation for activities they know are going to be problematic” (Cernea “Introduction” 1999:21).

What they do have is guidance on prevention, protections and planning from a number of United Nations agreements and agencies, international financial institutions (IFIs), and multi-lateral bodies. Key safeguards include those in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement; the World Bank Operational Policy on Resettlement (OP 4.12); the UN Comprehensive Guidelines for Development-based Displacement and the Basic Principles and Guidelines

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<sup>9</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into detail on the critiques of these safeguards (See Muggah 2003; Robinson 2003; Downing 2002; Barutciski 2006).

on Development-based Evictions and Displacement.<sup>10</sup> Some are theoretically binding, such as OP 4.12 in instances where Bank funding contributes to a project that involves resettlement; others are not.

It must be stressed that efforts to prevent resettlement in cases involving Indigenous Peoples are specifically required under OP 4.12 and UNDRIP, which outlaws the resettlement of Indigenous Peoples without their free, prior and informed consent (World Bank 2001:art. 9; UN 2007:art. 10).

Where resettlement is deemed unavoidable,<sup>11</sup> best practices dictate: the inclusion of affected people in planning; compensation for lost assets at full replacement cost; replacement land; protection for common property resources; provision of housing and essential services; assistance to improve or rebuild productive livelihoods, including through alternative means, training and technical support and income-generating opportunities; and transitional support in the interim (World Bank OP 4.12 2001: art. 6aiii, 6bii, 6ci; OECD 1992:6-7, 11, UN-OHCHR 1997: art. 16, 18, 24, 28e, g). The importance of both involving women in planning and prioritizing their rehabilitation through purposely-designed programs — in areas like education, employment and family welfare — has been underscored (UN-OHCHR 1997:art. 16, 28b). Ultimately, the process “should be conceived and executed as sustainable development programs, providing sufficient resources to enable the persons displaced by the project to share in project benefits,”

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<sup>10</sup> The Guiding Principles are the result of investigations by Francis M. Deng, Special Representative to the UN Secretary General on internally displaced persons, while the Comprehensive Guidelines came out of an Expert Seminar on The Practice of Forced Evictions, which was convened by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Basic Principles furthered the Comprehensive Guidelines and were elaborated by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing in 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Extra efforts to prevent resettlement in cases involving Indigenous Peoples are specifically required under OP 4.12 and UNDRIP, which outlaws the resettlement of Indigenous Peoples without their free, prior and informed consent (World Bank 2001:art. 9; UN 2007:art. 10). Notably, Lao PDR has signed the Declaration.

(World Bank OP 4.12 2001:2b) “rather than merely recreating poverty in new surroundings” (World Bank Involuntary 2004:72); and to this end World Bank borrowers are required under OP 4.12 to prepare resettlement plans that provide development assistance, such as “land preparation, credit facilities, training or job opportunities” (2001:art. 6c, ii-iii). While responsibility for ensuring that planning obligations are met generally rests with the state, the Comprehensive Guidelines make it clear that IFIs, transnational companies and other organizations must also be held accountable (UN-OHCHR 1997:art. 5).

However, critics have questioned the influence of these safeguards in light of their failure to be observed at the national level or be enforced by donors (De Wet 2006:193; Turton 2002:56; Barutciski 2006:82). In the absence of oversight, unplanned, under-funded and improperly implemented resettlement continues (Cernea 1993:393). As a result, Cernea concludes, “the majority of involuntary resettlement operations have been unsuccessful” (2000:15).

At the centre of this failure is the lack of understanding of the social, cultural and economic backgrounds of those being displaced that has marked most resettlement planning (Koenig 2006: 105; Kaur and Raj 1990:185; Downing 1996:45).<sup>12</sup> This ignorance has been aggravated by the widespread exclusion of affected peoples from decision-making (De Wet 2006:186-187), particularly women, as governments that do negotiate tend to do so exclusively with men (World Bank Involuntary 2004:75; Mehta and Srinivasan

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<sup>12</sup> Potentially lacking but necessary information for gender-inclusive resettlement planning includes: ownership and use of resources; decision-making power related to finances and resource use; income earning activities; available skills; and, the extent of reliance on livestock, forest and other assets (ADB 2003:9).

1999:15).<sup>13</sup> In tandem with “glaring insufficiencies” in cost-benefit analyses (Cernea 2000:45),<sup>14</sup> resulting rehabilitation schemes tend to be responsive to neither the complexities of DIDR nor the long-term needs of those being resettled (Cernea 1993:377; Turton 2002:58). Nor are diverse realities and needs often taken into account. As Colson (1999) notes, “multiple identities tend to disappear” and resettlers “become ungendered, uprooted, or are dealt with as undifferentiated households” (24). The “failure to understand intrahousehold dynamics is more likely to adversely affect women than men” (ADB 2003:1), and their diverse needs and contributions have been often overlooked in DIDR plans (Parasuraman 1999:211; Koenig 1995:32).<sup>15</sup>

Yet De Wet cautions that planning can also fall victim to the “inherent complexities” of development-induced displacement and resettlement, and as risks are experienced simultaneously, overwhelmed officials invoke “ad hoc crisis management, rather than rational procedure — with unanticipated and unintended outcomes” (2006:181, 187-188).

## **Section Two: Impacts**

Resettlement risks — anticipated or not — are more particularly products of the inequities and exclusion that are born of and motivate DIDR, and specifically stem from the loss of economic, social, and cultural resources (Cernea 2000:12; Koenig 2006:105). They are most profound during the “emergency phase” — a time of intense vulnerability

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<sup>13</sup> Apart from the bias of planners, women may be absent from resettlement planning because of: isolation from official contact (Tan et al. 2005:722); social and cultural norms that minimize the roles of women in decision making; and the failure of organizers to adapt existing male-dominated political structures to allow for more inclusive negotiations (ADB 2003:7). In the absence of participation by affected women, planners typically use unreliable or inadequate social and economic data on resettlers, with gender-disaggregated data in especially short supply (Koenig 2006:121; Tan et al. 2005:712).

<sup>14</sup> Including in the analysis of costs on the livelihoods of women, which is complicated by the fact that their traditional activities are often non-monetized (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:6).

<sup>15</sup> The ongoing failure to mitigate these risks has been attributed in part to the gender biases and assumptions that are inherent in development and resettlement planning (El Jack 2006:61, 64; Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:10).

immediately following relocation (Muggah 2003:14, 17) when “resettlers are faced with the daunting tasks of familiarizing themselves with a new natural resource base, new neighbours and new government expectations, while simultaneously developing new production systems and settling into new homes” (Scudder 1997:48). During this “painful” transition period, which can last at least two years, wellbeing can be expected to decline significantly (Scudder and Colson 1982:268; Scudder 1997:48). All too often, however, the real result is long-term impoverishment (Turton 2002:51) that drags on to determine the paths of future generations<sup>16</sup> (Scudder 1997:48, 51).

A growing body of literature has helped to shed light on the most common consequences of development-induced displacement and resettlement, including Cernea’s Rights and Reconstruction Model, which identifies eight main impoverishment risks: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, increased morbidity and mortality, food insecurity, loss of access to common property and community disarticulation or social disintegration (2000:20). To these have been added two other core threats: the discontinuation of education and the violation of human rights (Robinson 2003:13; Muggah 2003:12). Together their impacts are regularly multiplied to crisis-point by the near-simultaneous exposure encountered by new resettlers (Cernea 2000:31).

Concern over the disproportionate vulnerabilities experienced by women has been voiced by a growing number of organizations and DIDR researchers.<sup>17</sup> As the following pages will illustrate, this unique vulnerability is heightened by the range of physical,

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<sup>16</sup> In part because of the “tendency for the large majority of donor-funded and government projects to deal only with the initial years of resettlement” (Scudder 1997:51).

<sup>17</sup> See Cernea 2000; Downing 2002; World Bank *Involuntary* 2004; El Jack 2006; Colchester 2000; Bartolome et al. 2000; Scudder and Colson; ADB 2003.

economic, social and cultural changes and challenges they encounter through displacement and resettlement. While experienced differently by different women, the altered contexts of resettlement sites have fundamentally transformed gender relations and roles, often in ways that exacerbate existing gender inequalities, impose new biases (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:26; El Jack 2006:72-73; ADB 2003:1-2, 7) or expose women to new risks.

### **Physical Impacts: Morbidity, Mortality and Mental Health**

The most immediate impact post-resettlement can be severe deterioration in physical health (Cernea The Economics 1999:18). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports that resettled women have higher morbidity and mortality rates than men (2003:2), which are compounded by inadequate health care, unsafe sewage and water systems, increasing domestic violence, growing food insecurity, and inequitable distribution of food within some cultures (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:13-14; Cernea 2000:27-28); and as the elderly and children are most vulnerable (Cernea 1999:18), this raises the spectre of heightened caregiver burden on women.

Mental illness may also rise along with DIDR's psychological impacts, which include stress from negative social changes and having to cope with the "culture shock" of immersion in unfamiliar surroundings where futures are unknown (Scott and Scott 1989:16-17; Scudder and Colson 1982:270). The changes that accompany resettlement can likewise induce "demoralization, frustration, alienation and apathy" (Kaur and Raj 1990:185) and low self-esteem, which can worsen as independence and self-sufficiency are lost (Ng 1999:88). Parasuraman (1999) stresses that the uncertainties surrounding resettlement can be "extremely unsettling" for women, who are not often in a position to be

able to communicate their needs and problems (212). Indigenous Peoples and other rural groups may face higher than average levels of psychological distress (Doná and Berry 1999:175; Scudder and Colson 1982:270).

## **Economic Impacts**

Much of the attention of DIDR researchers, however, has been on economic impacts and their findings point to growing financial insecurity and economic exclusion as key contributors to the problems women encounter in resettlement areas. Indeed, economic impoverishment has been identified as “the most widespread effect of involuntary displacement” (Cernea 2000:12), owing to lost assets, inadequate compensation, and heightened levels of landlessness, food insecurity, unemployment, decapitalization (associated with the costs of rebuilding and rising expenses) and debt (Bartolome et al. 2000: v, 6; Scudder and Colson 1982:270; De Wet 2006:183).

At the core of this impoverishment is altered access to the resources on which women rely and the subsequent failure of rehabilitation plans to enable multiple, productive lifestyles to be rebuilt (Parasuraman 1999:213). Citing the importance of women’s contributions to household incomes, the ADB calls the “restoration of livelihood and income equally important to women and men” (2003:3). To this end Mehta and Srinivasan note three categories of vital resources for women: natural resources (including land, water and forest products), economic resources (such as credit, skills training and market access), and socio-cultural resources, like kinship networks and forms of social capital (1999:7).

Yet, even where resources exist, numerous barriers have complicated access for women post-resettlement, including macro-economic variables at the regional, national and

international levels, class, caste, and cultural norms regarding gender roles and divisions of labour (Koenig 1995:22). These barriers are neither necessarily static nor pre-existing, and as Mehta and Srinivasan note: “there are bound to be massive shifts in the ways in which men and women access and control resources,” with gender biases often intrinsic to the operation of the market economy (1999:7, 26).

**Loss of Traditional Livelihoods — Land and Natural Resources:** The combined loss of land and natural resources through displacement has led to deteriorating conditions for many women, severely constraining both their own incomes and their contributions to family survival, and subsequently leading to a decline in status within the household and the community (Fernandes 1995: 1, 2, 4). The expropriation of land, especially, removes “the main foundation upon which people’s productive systems, commercial activities, and livelihoods are constructed” (Cernea The Economics 1999:17). The impacts on women are critical (Koenig 1995:27-28; Parasuraman 1999:226), and as Bartolome et al. (2000) warn, land may be women’s only “sustainable resource base” (31).

This far-reaching dependence highlights the crucial role of replacement land in averting impoverishment post-resettlement. Nonetheless, evidence from numerous countries indicates that the replacement land provided has typically been inadequate, both in size and quality (Tan et al. 2005:725; Cernea 2000:23-24).<sup>18</sup> Land shortages have been tied to competition from established residents, prioritization of fields for cash crops, and relocation to degraded or ill-suited lands (Koenig 1995:28). Once given, rebuilding output levels on new land can take years (Cernea 2000:27).

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<sup>18</sup> Limited land allocations have in turn adversely impacted food security (Cernea 2000:27).

But access has continued to be limited for women in many parts of the world<sup>19</sup> (Koenig 1995:28), where land titles, and at times share certificates for future crops, are often registered in the name of the male head of household (Ng 1999:89; Scudder and Colson 1982:284-285). The risk of disinheritance is especially profound for resettled Tribal women, who may have use rights although generally not official title (Aird 2001). Without title, Indigenous and ethnic minority women are time and again ineligible for compensation and sometimes for rehabilitation resources (Colchester 2000:26). Access issues may be further relevant to the experiences and future tenure of displaced young people, and in Ethiopia, Kebede (2001) reported growing competition among siblings for land, especially in large families, as the resettlement process had reserved “no extra land for such new families coming of age” (87). Biased access has in turn prompted increased dependence on the goodwill of men (Jacobs 1996:37).

The loss of common property resources<sup>20</sup> in resettlement sites is similarly all too familiar (Cernea 2000:5, 29). Indigenous, Tribal and poor rural women in particular rely on their environments as sources of “nutrition, their contribution to the family economy, and of work and of social relations for themselves outside the family” (Fernandes 1995:2). Parasuraman concludes that without the replacement of traditional sources of livelihood, women may be pushed into more exploitative sectors (1999:226).

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<sup>19</sup> This is often true even where matrilineal inheritance or past use rights have existed (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:7, 20). However, Koenig suggests that where complementary agriculture exists, as it does in parts of Asia, the impact of discriminatory access to replacement land may be less, although she admits that far more is known about the effects of altered land access in Africa, where men and women tend to farm different fields and crops (1995:29).

<sup>20</sup> Common property resources include water, edible forest products and animals, firewood and fodder.

**Rising Workloads:** Amidst constraints on land and natural resources,<sup>21</sup> women in relocated communities have been forced to shoulder heavier workloads to make up for shortfalls in household incomes (Colson 1971:127). This burden has also been linked to new disparities in the division of labour amidst production changes toward commercial agriculture, the loss of traditional duties for men in the face of land and job shortages, and declining contributions as alcoholism increases among displaced men (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:21; El Jack 2006:75; Parasuraman 1999:219).

Notably, increased work may additionally fall on the younger generation. In Sudan, extra duties associated with resettlement were often passed on to daughters (El Jack 2006:66) and in the context of conflict-induced displacement Hart (2002) highlights the denial of “leisure opportunities” as one of the known impacts on refugee children (4).<sup>22</sup>

**Rehabilitation Resources and Benefits:** In spite of these new responsibilities, displaced women “have little access to and control over the benefits” that are sometimes associated with resettlement (Gururaja 2000:13), particularly those stemming from compensation, services and employment opportunities.

In many relocated communities compensation is never awarded (Cernea 1996:303-304) and when it is, it may cover only limited assets, with women often overlooked in favour of payments to men (Kebede 2001:110; ADB 2003:3) — this despite evidence that they are more apt to use those funds for the restoration of livelihoods. The ADB warns that “often

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<sup>21</sup> Including growing deforestation and the placement of resettlement sites long distances from forests and water sources, which adds hours of work a day (Fernandes 1995:5).

<sup>22</sup> Conversely, Fernandes noted that some resettled Tribal women in India “complained about a decrease in their workload, which affects their morale just as much as additional workloads” (1995:5).

the needs of women are not met if cash is paid to the male head of household,” who prioritize status items and personal consumption (2003:13, 25).

**Service Infrastructure and Education:** Because women are typically motivated by a combination of wanting to improve their family’s well being, expanding their economic activities and lightening the heavy workloads common in remote areas, the promises of services regularly attached to resettlement plans hold particular importance for them (Koenig 1995: 22, 34-35). This was recognized by the World Bank in its Directive on Poverty Reduction (OD 4.15), which stated: “the burden of poverty falls disproportionately on women; so it is essential to increase... their access to social services” (qtd. in Involuntary 2004:72).<sup>23</sup>

Although resettlement has at times enhanced access to basic infrastructure, like schools, water, health clinics and markets, experience has also shown that these services can introduce new expenses (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:7, 11; Koenig 2006:109, 116; 1995:34-35). Conversely, in other instances resettlers have been excluded from project benefits, like electricity in the case of dam-induced displacement, or have lost access to public services that they previously enjoyed (Turton 2002: 54; Downing 2002:11).

And despite the physical presence of new schools in some consolidated communities, education is all too often interrupted or discontinued following resettlement (Cernea 2000:31). Girls are most at risk, a fact that has been attributed to poverty, high costs of rebuilding and work demands in resettlement areas (Ng 1999:88; Tan et al. 2005:729-730).

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<sup>23</sup> OD 4.15 was subsequently replaced by OP 1.00, which contains no such statement and rather supports the visions and strategies of borrower countries for poverty reduction (World Bank Operational 2004).

Instead many are compelled to join the labour force at young ages and in doing so must face the consequences of prematurely suspended education (Downing 2002:11-12).

**Replacement Incomes and Employment — Barriers to women:** Few women are adequately prepared to prosper post-resettlement, especially in the context of changing modes of production,<sup>24</sup> or in other instances when existing skills often lose their worth (El Jack 2006:74); and where agricultural extension, credit and training are provided, retraining for women is frequently overlooked (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:20). Faced with a shortage of options to improve their agricultural stakes, some displaced women have increasingly become reliant on wage labour (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:13; Picciotto et al. 2001:34).

However in practice, unemployment and underemployment among women, men and young people can be common in resettlement areas, which according to Tan et al. (2005) are marked by “low levels of economic development and lack of capacity to absorb [surplus] rural labourers, especially women” (711, 723, 725). Options for women have been limited by: internalized and imposed gender biases; class constraints and discrimination against resettlers; and limited education, skills and language, amidst competition from men, landless households and immigrants (Parasuraman 1999:215-216; Tan et al. 2005:711, 725, 731; ADB 2003:1-3; Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:10). The transition is especially difficult for Indigenous women, who face unique barriers in securing skilled work because of especially low literacy and limited exposure to the outside world. As with agriculture, a key failing has been in the area of skills training and as

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<sup>24</sup> For instance, the transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture, from swidden to paddy farming.

Fernandes points out of DIDR in India, “the focus is invariably on men” (1995:5).

There is some indication of women increasingly being employed as agricultural labourers (Tan et al. 2005:723; Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:13); however in India these opportunities offered only low wages, were mostly taken up by low-caste or nomadic tribes and were again constrained by gendered competition (Parasuraman 1999: 223, 227).

“Occupational mobility” in the transition to non-agricultural production post-resettlement has been more limited (Tan et al. 2005:725) and gains for many resettled Indian women have been restricted to the margins of the labour market, with the most desperate forced to take up casual or informal jobs (Parasuraman 1999:216-217).

**Cash, Consumerism and Dependence:** Together barriers to both traditional and replacement sources of livelihood have spelled a drop in the incomes of many women post-resettlement (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:14; Picciotto et al. 2001:34; Tan et al. 2005:725), with poverty levels — real and relative —intensified by the introduction of previously isolated populations into a cash nexus. In this context the outcome has often been a new reliance on cash (De Wet 2006:184-185), and mounting expenses for shelter, food and agricultural inputs<sup>25</sup> (Ng 1999:83, 86, 88), which are prime areas of concern for women. But spending on non-essential items has risen simultaneously and new exposure to shops and to members of the dominant culture have prompted demand for better clothing, entertainment and other sundries (Colson 1971:137; Fernandes 1995:6). Often fully immersed for the first time in a cash economy, there is some indication of new resettlers being unable to manage money effectively and in select cases compensation money has

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<sup>25</sup> In pre-resettlement Zambia, Colson noted that “money was for what one could not produce” and people believed “most money should be used to provide against the future” (1971:137).

been spent quickly, leading to impoverishment (ADB 2003:25), or “often is wasted on nonproductive uses” (Nayak 2000:87). As previously noted, men have been found to be more likely to prioritize status items and personal consumption (ADB 2003:13).

Alternatively, resettlers may be forced to spend compensation monies on immediate subsistence needs (Fernandes 1995:4).

Resettlement into cash-based and commercial agriculture-oriented economies has for many also meant a transformation of gender relations, marked by the loss of women’s autonomy in decision-making, male control over women’s labour, the assignment of differential values to women’s labour and polarized access to and control over monetary and other resources (Ng 1999:86, 89; Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:13). The dependency created by these changes and lost resources forced women to rely on their husbands for their livelihoods (Kebede 2001:111; Fernandes 1995:2; ADB 2003:23), with single, widowed or divorced women made especially vulnerable (ADB 2003:7; Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:30).<sup>26</sup> Women in Malaysia recognized that “money is power” and in a climate where little was available, resettlers were “extremely unhappy and restless about the scheme and their future” (Ng 1990: 88, 90).

Labour exploitation, lack of financial freedom and dependency on parents have been similarly reflected in the experience of resettled young people. In Ethiopia the withdrawal of disposable incomes from sons prompted “behavioural problems” (Kebede 2001:113); while in Zambia “young men were expected to find their own money for clothing and other luxuries.” They responded by escaping to fish camps or town, where they could spend their earnings freely away from the claims of elders in the village (Colson 1971:104-105, 138).

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<sup>26</sup> Resettled women in India reported less decision-making power and lower disposable incomes (Picciotto et al. 2001:34).

## **Socio-cultural Impacts**

The economic impacts of DIDR have both compounded socio-cultural challenges and created new ones. Cernea identifies “social disarticulation” as a key risk in resettled communities, where social changes have spelled the loss of social capital and “the weakening of control on interpersonal behaviour” (2000:30). Indigenous Peoples have again been especially vulnerable, and amidst changes in the economy and ecology the “social and cultural aspects of tribal life have failed to change at the same pace,” resulting in parts of India in a breakdown in social order and the proliferation of social problems (Parasuraman 1999:218-219). But even where stresses have been less severe, the transformed socio-cultural context of resettlement sites has had far-reaching implications for gendered, intra-family and societal relations. For women the social costs of DIDR are thought to be disproportionately high (ADB 2003:5; Koenig 2006:119) and their new realities have often been marked by marginalization within the household and society.

**Mixed Communities, Marginalization and the Loss of Status:** In numerous cases relocation has involved the scattering of resettled populations within larger, ethnically-mixed communities (De Wet 2006:183).<sup>27</sup> Perceived as strangers in these settings, resettlers have been denied opportunities and the ensuing competition for host-owned and common resources, scarce services and employment has created enduring social tensions and conflict (Cernea 2000: 26, 29, 32, 41).<sup>28</sup> Beyond economic exclusion, psychological, social and cultural marginalization have also resulted as resettlers lose

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<sup>27</sup> Where rural “practices and values” may be simultaneously changing in response to increased “circulation of information, capital, commodities, and people” in the context of development and globalization (McRae 2002:167).

<sup>28</sup> Environmental degradation has also resulted as resettlers facing livelihoods constraints become overly reliant on the common property resources of host communities (Cernea 2000:29).

control over their environments and have their socio-cultural traditions stigmatized by established residents (Koenig 2006:108; Cernea 2000:25-26, 28).

The subsequent decline in status and stratification of society along class lines (Downing 2002:11; Scudder and Colson 1982:275) has had broad implications, including for consumerism. Colson cautions that as some prosper and others are impoverished “major differences in life style are difficult to accommodate within the village... [where] people had too intimate a knowledge of one another’s affairs for expenditures on consumption to escape unnoticed” (1971:165); Fernandes stresses that heightened consumerism among resettlers can in part be attributed to the trauma of change, and for both men and women “accepting status symbols like expensive clothes... is one way of coping with it” (1995:6).

For the worst affected, this manifold marginalization manifests as “loss of confidence in society and in themselves, a feeling of injustice... [and] anxiety,” which ultimately leads to “cultural and behavioural impairments” and “deepened vulnerability” (Cernea 2000:26).

**Women — Losing Status and Social Supports:** Many resettled women are doubly marginalized and despite their substantial contributions to rebuilding and livelihoods post-resettlement, their roles are “rarely acknowledged” (Parasuraman 1999:222). Rather there is widespread evidence that women actually lose standing within the household and the community as their monetary contributions become more limited (Downing 2002:12) and traditional activities like food production are seen as having no value (Ng 1999:90). The frequent result has been the loss of autonomy in decision-making and dependence on men’s incomes (Fernandes 1995:2, 4; Downing 2002:12).

The increasing subordination of women has been compounded by the weakening of

community support systems (Fernandes 1995:1), especially through the dispersal of community and kin networks on which women rely heavily in times of crisis. These networks provide both reciprocal economic and emotional assistance (ADB 2003:2, 5; Parasuraman 1999:212-213).

**The Abandonment or Loss of Culture:** Social stress or imbalance can also stem from resettled populations losing their “sense of place” (El Jack 2006:64), which for Indigenous Peoples in particular is so often based in the inextricable link between land and culture (Downing 2002:11). When this happens the key role of women in upholding cultural traditions can be lost — and with it, the status and authority that such responsibility had conferred (Ng 1999:89). Yet in the context of larger settlements, increased social interaction with hosts and even being exposed to ridicule, cultural traditions have also been ‘voluntarily’ discontinued (Kebede 2001:102) and in many instances those being displaced “have gone beyond adopting individual customs and have internalized the mainstream ideology” (Fernandes 1995:7). Notably young women tend to feel the pain of lost space and culture less than older women, and instead may resist the imposition of traditional roles as their environments change (Forbes Martin 2004:16).

**Family Relations:** Together the changes and hardships of DIDR have had a “profound effect on family dynamics” (Colson 1999:26). Colson’s (1971) work showed an “immediate and severe impact, often straining relationships to the breaking point.” This unforeseen complication arose when “resettlement altered the context within which family members were accustomed to interact or [disrupted] the old reciprocal arrangements which

had made the family system seem equitable to its members” (Colson 1971:101). Both parent-child and spousal relationships have been vulnerable.

Of particular concern is growing marital tensions in new communities, where increases in alcoholism, drug dependency and domestic violence by men against women and children (Colson 1999:31-32) can make the positions of women even more tenuous post-resettlement (Mehta and Srinivasan 1999:9; ADB 2003:2). This extreme behaviour may result when male responsibilities and choices are constrained by the loss of land and livelihoods through displacement (Forbes Martin 2004:15; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004:162-163), which often leads to frustration, feelings of powerlessness and lowered self-esteem (Colson 1999:31; ADB 2003:22). El Jack (2006) contends that men from non-dominant groups may be particularly susceptible because “they have lost the socio-economic and political roles of breadwinners, decision makers, and protectors” (66). Resettled men have in turn reacted to this perceived loss of status by demanding more of their families (Colson 1971:132). Ironically, new economic roles taken on by women have added to tensions as they are again seen as symbols of the inability of men to provide (Forbes Martin 2004:15).

Evidence of deteriorating parent-child relations has likewise been a common feature in existing and evolving knowledge. In the context of Ethiopia, Kebede attributes this to a “spillover from diminishing economic status” post-resettlement, the failure to register married sons as independents (which impacted land access), and the exclusion of children from resettlement compensation (2001:86). Intensified work demands on sons, exploitative labour conditions and unfulfilled dependencies also contributed to inter-generational

tensions in Zambia. Colson aptly sums up the growing pains that come head-to-head with DIDR: “The move caused most friction when it caught families at the critical point in the development cycle when a man tries to maintain control over sons who are reaching maturity and anxious to establish a degree of control over their own activities” (1971:101-102).

As with their fathers, the self-confidence of young people may be similarly compromised in camp settings by “boredom, absence of goals and loss of direction”<sup>29</sup> (Gururaja 2000:14). Yet most often it is their easier adaptation that is singled out for its role in fueling unrest or unsettling changes for other family members (Koenig 2006:120; Forbes Martin 2004:15-16). Tensions may result as their behaviours change, as they seek more freedom from elders (Koenig 2006:120), and as responsibilities are reversed, with “children, including older girls... able to assume economic roles that are unavailable to their parents” (Forbes Martin 2004:15-16). New social relations also challenge existing ties post-displacement (Gururaja 2000:13).

## **Section Three: Adaptation**

While the diversity of DIDR experiences examined in this review raise questions about the existence of absolute responses to resettlement, early thinking on stages of adaptation may still be useful in understanding the reactions of certain individuals or groups. Scudder and Colson, for instance, argued that because coping strategies are limited by severe stresses in the aftermath of involuntary resettlement, adaptive responses are predictable and follow four stages: recruitment, transition, potential development and the handing over of

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<sup>29</sup> It is not clear to what extent this is influenced by discontinuing education post-displacement, particularly for girls.

responsibilities to the next generation. The transition stage, they claimed, is marked by conservatism in socio-cultural and economic responses, aversion to risk and the embracing of traditional activities;<sup>30</sup> but as standards of living begin to rise, responses begin to be characterized by “increased initiative and risk taking” (Scudder and Colson 1982: 267, 272-275) and the expansion of productive horizons beyond mere subsistence (Scudder 1997:49).<sup>31</sup>

This and other theories suggesting set adaptive reactions to resettlement have drawn considerable criticism, including from Scott and Scott (1989), who warn against assuming homogenous responses by homogenous societies, since individuals “are constantly in the process of changing partly in response to the ‘various’ cultures they contact” (14-15). Likewise, Camino and Krulfeld (1994) insist “the process of adaptation is also a creative one, of establishing a new culture and new identities, of exploration and experimentation” (x). Displaced young people have especially been singled out for their potential “energy and creativity” (Hart 2002:17); and Kebede argues that “people cope in relation to problems and opportunities, not years of stay in resettlement villages” (2001:122).

Thus adaptation is a combination of action and reaction that can lead to new economic opportunities, migration and sometimes sex work.

**Changing Expectations, Exposure and Consumerism:** At the heart of this adaptation for some are changing expectations in resettlement sites, with attendant social, cultural and economic implications. Perhaps most visible has been the influence of consumer goods and modern styles. Colson writes of the Gwembe Tonga: “In earlier years,

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<sup>30</sup> This stage, Scudder says, lasts for at least a year or two or until resettlers “have adjusted to their new habitat” (1997:48).

<sup>31</sup> Scudder and Colson, nonetheless, have admitted most resettlers do not progress beyond the transition stage (1982:275).

they expected little, and the limits of their economic horizon were clearly defined” (1971:134); but as earnings from wage labour and other activities increased, the wireless broadcast the music and messages of a different culture, and new roads brought cash, consumer goods and outsiders; “town” became the standard for dress, consumption and entertainment. Young women, above all, were possessed by the need to display visual signs of modernity (Colson 1971:137, 165-171).

Koenig (2006) also found that traditional social cohesion can be challenged when “lower caste and younger people who wish to take advantage of new opportunities sometimes prefer new social networks” (2006:110). More freedom in dating for women has similarly characterized a number of resettlement/refugee experiences (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004:157; Spring 1982:38); and young women among the Gwembe Tonga “had begun to talk of alternatives to marriage” as exposure to single professional women increased through resettlement (Colson 1971:114).

Education too has the potential to alter the outlooks of young people and Tan et al. note that it “can broaden women’s views of their roles at home and in society, increase their self-esteem, inspire them to fight for gender equality and search for opportunities to improve their status in and outside the home” (2005:729).

Yet it is often the external world, not the local, that enables new ambitions; de Wet cautions that relocation can lead to a “more urban-oriented focus” (2006:184-185). Among most Kariba-displaced sons, “the resettlement was no longer of much interest, as they did not see it determining their own futures... Their destiny was bound up with the overall prosperity of Zambia” (Colson 1971:155).

**New economic opportunities:** Whether or not opportunities exist, what remains constant for displaced women is that they are still expected to provide for their families (Gururaja 2000:13). In response many have assumed new responsibilities (El Jack 2006:75) and Anita Agnihotri, the former director of Resettlement and Rehabilitation in Orissa, has stated that she is “convinced that women played a much larger role in re-establishing families and picking up economic links, while men passively adjusted to changes and shocks” (qtd. in ADB 2003:27). Writing on refugee women, Forbes Martin (2004) calls their ability to do so, “resilient and inventive” and notes that having a range of diverse economic strategies “can be crucial in enabling the family to survive” (17, 87). Where formal opportunities are absent or inaccessible, such strategies include the service economy and informal sector (Koenig 1995:27, 33-34).

Apart from economic need, the openness of women to unaccustomed roles may in some settings be prompted by a desire to be free from patriarchal traditions (Koenig 2006:119-120). This is echoed in the motivations of daughters who often “welcome those changes that liberate them from previous subordinations” (Essed et al. 2004:12), such as the control of elders and caste constraints (Koenig 2006:120; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004:157). New employment choices for young refugees can further “offer stability and a means to enhance self-esteem in the midst of great uncertainty” (Hart 2002:16).

However, even where younger women have access to opportunities that are otherwise denied to older women (Picciotto et al. 2001:34; Koenig 2006:120), availing themselves of those opportunities could require sufficient credit, skills and a favourable location, ideally close to an urban centre (Koenig 1995:34; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 156).

**Migration:** In the absence of sufficient local resources or opportunities, and as the need for cash increases, some resettled women have turned to migration — either individually or as a family (Picciotto et al. 2001:34; Parasuraman 1999:224; Fernandes 1995:8).

Yet there is a dearth of information on the full causes of female migration within resettlement contexts. De Wet notes generally that changes in modern consumption patterns can and do drive resettlers “outwards to the regional or national labour market” (2006:184-185). In this vein, migration by young men has been linked to unequal distribution amidst excessive work demands, claims of elders on their earnings and the absence of money for luxuries or sundries in the period following resettlement (Colson 1971:101-104, 105, 138); and as displaced Indigenous men in India lost status in their new communities, Fernandes found that they tried to compensate by “by migrating to another place, improving their economic status and getting absorbed into another value system and society” (1995:8)

Although the motivations of some migrating men may offer insight into the mobility of daughters and wives, it must be acknowledged that women migrants face distinct dangers and disproportionately negative consequences. Writing on Indigenous women in India, Fernandes warns: “the woman, being illiterate and less exposed to the external world, is forced to accept only very low status jobs at exploitative wages” (1995:8).

**Sex work and Trafficking:** One form of work to which displaced women have turned is sex work. The role of conflict-induced displacement in drawing refugee women and girls into sex work, or making children vulnerable to traffickers, is by now well known (UNIFEM 2002:54). Far less is understood about the connections between the sex sector

and development-induced displacement and resettlement, although a number of DIDR researchers have noted the presence of displaced women in sex work (Colchester 2000:27; Colson 1971:131; ADB 2003:5; Levy 2001:3; Cistoldi Lee 2001:151). Yet most reduce the outcome to a single sentence, without offering much in the way of analysis on the complex and cumulative causes that may have contributed to the decisions or vulnerability of displaced women. For instance, Colchester identifies “economic hardship” as key in driving these women into sex work (2000:27); Phongklieng (1999) argues that alternative options for “hill tribe” women are limited by infertile resettlement land, their exclusive agricultural skill base, and language difficulties (113).<sup>32</sup> El Jack further warns that the hardships of resettlement make women vulnerable to violence, including forced prostitution (2006:73).<sup>33</sup>

In contrast, McRae (2002) insists that sex work in general “occupies a central position in appreciations of social change” (2002:178). Notably, the disintegration of family life in conflict settings and the disruption of social norms that govern sexual behaviour can prompt young people to engage in earlier sex, while men may respond to the loss of status by seeking multiple partners (UNIFEM 2002:52-53).

It is more likely that sex work in the context of development-induced displacement and resettlement is a combination of economic, social and cultural forces, as was the case with displaced ethnic minority sex workers in Thailand, who were “pushed by poverty” and

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<sup>32</sup> The economics argument is also espoused in writing on conflict, environmental and political refugees (Forbes Martin 2004:92; UNIFEM 2002:52). Cistoldi Lee (2001) found that a number of women displaced by Hurricane Mitch turned to sex work as a result of the “severe impoverishment” in camps and “the lack of mainstream formal or informal work available to them there.” However, she acknowledged that “sex work involves a complex set of push and pull factors” (Cistoldi Lee 2001:151).

<sup>33</sup> Writing on the impacts of violence, Nyakabwa and Lavoie (1995) note that as “victims of repeated sexual assault, and responsible for the survival of their children, many of the most destitute women refugees decide to make a profit out of their situation and... resort to prostitution as a living” (28).

“lured by city lights” (Ekachai 2002); while Colson notes that “discontent” led a few resettled women in Zambia to seek a new life through sex work (1971:130-131).

## **Next Steps**

*Despite the volumes that have been produced on development-induced displacement and resettlement, clear consensus on the vulnerability of displaced women, and evidence of their agency amidst challenges and changes, more research is clearly needed on its role in leading resettled women and girls into sex work. In the following chapters I will attempt to bridge some of the gaps in existing knowledge by examining how development, displacement, resettlement and sex work are experienced and intersect in the Lao PDR.*

## **A Nation in Motion: Development *and* displacement in Lao PDR?**

A former French colony, Lao PDR has been governed by the Communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party since it seized power in 1975. The victory over the Royalists allowed the remote country to retreat into isolation for a time, but in 1986 the state launched the New Economic Mechanism and since then has gradually opened itself to the outside world, adopting a market economy and integrating economically with other nations in the region.

At the heart of this ongoing transformation is the goal of being elevated from the status of least developed country by 2020 (ADB Poverty 2001:1). This lofty objective is to be realized through: agricultural development to increase food production for self-sufficiency and export; the elimination of opium cultivation by 2006; phasing-out shifting cultivation by 2010; investments in infrastructure; rural development; and economic growth and expanded foreign economic relations (Lao NGPES 2004:3; UNDP 2001:5-6).

Central to these and other priorities is the longstanding obsession of the state with the perceived need to “integrate the most remote areas into the market economy” and “ethnic minorities into the national culture,” while at the same time preserving and profiting from the natural resources on which they rely (Goudineau 1997:13).

For over two decades displacement and resettlement have been the vehicles for this vision of nation-building in Lao PDR, although the final destination for Indigenous and ethnic minority Peoples who have been relocated from remote areas in the uplands to

lowland and roadside communities is less clear; and as this chapter will show, in the place of promised development they have instead often been greeted by new poverty, new expectations and previously unknown vulnerabilities, including vulnerabilities to migration, sexual exploitation and trafficking for sex work. The following pages will explore existing knowledge on development, displacement and resettlement<sup>34</sup> in the country through two main sections. The first gives an overview of related policies and practices, with an introduction to the unique challenges posed by ethnic and gender disparities; the second presents the physical, economic and socio-cultural impacts and changes imposed by displacement and resettlement in Lao PDR.

## **Section One: Overview of the Policy Context**

### **The Challenge of Development in Lao PDR**

The Laotian context presents a number of unique challenges to realizing poverty reduction and growth on the scale envisioned by the state; this is reflected in its most recent development indicators, which remain among the lowest in the world: 33 per cent of the population still lives under the national poverty line and 44 per cent on less than \$1.25/day (UNDP 2009:177). To be fair, overall human development levels have improved over past years (UNDP 2007:236), yet these gains veil the mounting inequality that is manifested in urban-rural disparities and stark differences between the country's regions and ethnic minorities (Rigg 2003:1, 3). With over three-quarters of the nation's 5.6 million people living in the rural communities (UNDP 2006:2), the World Bank cautions that any attempt

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<sup>34</sup> It is a comprehensive review, but because of political resistance to research on resettlement that prevents some studies from identifying communities as resettled or not, some relevant sources may have been missed.

to “reduce poverty in Lao PDR will need to focus on raising standards of living in rural areas” (1995:43).

The nation’s inhospitable ecology has, however, proved a major barrier to rural development and other strategic priorities with which the process is so intertwined.<sup>35</sup> Lao PDR is a mountainous country, with uplands comprising up to 85 per cent of the nation's total surface area (Akkharath 2003:5). Consequently only three per cent is used for *permanent* or paddy agriculture (UNDP 2006:3), most in the fertile plains adjacent to the Mekong River or along narrow river valleys in the interior.

The geography of the country does not allow for irrigated paddy in the uplands, where swidden is instead used on often-steep slopes. Known alternately as shifting cultivation or “slash and burn,” swidden has in the past relied on long fallows of 15 to 25 years and few inputs (Chazee 1998:16; Rasul and Thapa 2003:495). Roughly 45 per cent of the nation’s villages, comprising 280,000 mostly ethnic minority families, depended on this type of cropping at the close of the last decade (Evrard and Goudineau 2004:938). Despite its appropriateness for the terrain, swidden is commonly believed to generate lower yields than paddy (UNDP 2001:76), which has translated in some communities to rice deficits (Douangdy 2000:59).<sup>36</sup> By extension, a majority of upland cultivators are still largely subsistence based (UNDP 2006:2), especially in the North, where most swidden farmers

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<sup>35</sup> Poverty has been compounded by a lack of roads, especially in the uplands, and in 2003 villages in the North averaged between 7-16km distant from the nearest road (UNDP 2006:182). According to the GoL this has limited market access, “discouraged investment [in services] and hindered international assistance” (Lao NGPES 2004:52, 54).

<sup>36</sup> Opium is produced and sold by a number of ethnic groups to offset these shortages, while fruit and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are routinely collected to supplement family consumption (UNDP 2001:43; Rasul and Thapa 2003:496).

reside (Seidenberg et al. 2003:72). These provinces are the poorest in Lao PDR (UNDP 2006: 174).<sup>37</sup>

This presents a major obstacle to realizing the state's vision of intensified cultivation and market production; thus resettlement has become the favoured tool with which to "facilitate" rural and national development strategies. The impetuses for resettlement, while complex, are underscored by the economic importance of agriculture, and more generally the nation's natural resources.<sup>38</sup>

For these reasons, in tandem with local opium production, the Northern provinces are where resettlement has been most aggressively implemented (Morales<sup>39</sup> 13 June 2006). Yet in the North, as elsewhere, resettlement is also inextricably intertwined with ethnicity.

### **Unparalleled Ethnicity, Unparalleled Poverty**

With minorities comprising 93 per cent of the nation's poor (UNDP 2001:61), no viable discussion of rural development and resettlement in Lao PDR can be separated from ethnicity. It is a country of nearly unparalleled diversity and is home to over 230 distinct ethnic groups, classified under 4 main ethno-linguistic families (ADB 2004:6). Together, ethnic minorities make up roughly 70 per cent of the population, a proportion that climbs to 87 per cent in the North. The remaining 30 per cent are ethnic Lao (UNDP 2001:57-58).

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<sup>37</sup> Only 0-5 per cent of the population of the North had paid employment in 2002/2003 and 82-94 per cent instead relied on subsistence farms for their livelihoods (UNDP 2006:180).

<sup>38</sup> Akkharath (2003) reports that agriculture and forestry have been singled out by the state as the main engines of socio-economic and rural development for at least the next 15 years (4). In 2004, agriculture employed 1.8 million Laotians, comprised 46.8 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and brought in \$38 million of the \$587 million USD generated by all exports. Timber goods drew \$145 million, mining another \$64 million and hydroelectricity \$105 million (UNDP 2006: 181, 189, 197, 205). While the export outlook for the future will no doubt be altered by such factors as the completion of the East-West and North-South corridor highways linking China, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam through Lao PDR, along with marked increases in foreign investment in mining (\$304 million USD in 2003/2004) and the start of operations at new hydro-electric facilities, the increasingly accessible agricultural sector continues to play a central and growing role in both the domestic and export economies (UNDP 2006:191, 205).

<sup>39</sup> *Not his/her real name.* Evo Morales is a researcher working on Lao PDR.

Despite official recognition of the equality of all ethnic peoples in The Constitution (Lao 1991: art. 8), the exclusion of minorities has been ongoing for decades. Historically many ethnic groups have been ideologically and geographically remote, both from each other<sup>40</sup> and the nation-state, and as the Iresons argue: “at no time... prior to the late 1970s did any national government have an effective presence at the village level throughout its territory” (1991:923).

Early attempts to instill a nationalist identity included the introduction of a naming system that saw all ethnicities classified as either Lao Loum, Lao Theung or Lao Seung (Ovesen 2004:221-222). According to this imprecise system the Lao Loum (Tai-Kadai groups including the dominant ethnic Lao) reside in the lowlands and the Lao Theung (Mon-Khmer) in sloping lands, watershed areas or valleys around plains, while the Lao Seung (Hmong-Mien and Tibeto-Burmans) inhabit mountain summits (Chazee 1998:6; World Bank 2004:9).<sup>41</sup> Various other characteristics have rightly or wrongly come to be affiliated with these labels over the years, including that the Lao Theung and Lao Seung respectively practice rotational swidden and pioneering agriculture,<sup>42</sup> in contrast to the Lao Loum who cultivate paddy, and that the Lao Seung grow opium. These are far from absolute and Ovesen (2004) challenges that rather than building a national sentiment, they have instead reinforced the perceived moral superiority of the ethnic Lao (216).

Real discrimination has in turn been reflected in official programs and policies that underwrite Lao supremacy and reflect a lowland bias (Ovesen 2004:214; UNDP

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<sup>40</sup> Prior to resettlement “virtually all inhabitants of Laos lived in ethnically homogenous villages [and] most areas saw little intermixture of the broad lowland-midland highland groupings” (Ireson and Ireson 1991:923).

<sup>41</sup> The Mon-Khmer are believed to be Indigenous (Ireson and Ireson 1991:922; Ovesen 2004:216).

<sup>42</sup> Pioneering swidden does not involve the rotation of fields, but farming one plot until it is exhausted.

2001:67), including in the distribution of “foreign aid, foreign investment, and private economic ventures” (Ireson and Ireson 1991:925). For upland communities the cumulative effect of their difference, along with remoteness and inaccessibility, has been “the highest poverty and lowest quality of life indicators in the country” — a distinction which has its footings in, among other factors, restricted access to health services, education, potable water and electricity, compounded by isolation from the market economy (Douangsavanh et al. 2003:82-83).

Ironically these groups are now experiencing forced inclusion — spatially, economically, socially and culturally — through restrictive policies on upland agriculture and resettlement to more closely administered and ethnically consolidated communities in lowland and roadside areas. Pholsena acknowledges that resettlement and land allocation<sup>43</sup> have generated “indirect or unforeseen problems,” but stresses that there are “no laws or policies that overtly or directly seek to prevent economic development for ethnic minorities in the Lao PDR” (2003:13).

Rather, The Constitution requires that “the State take *every* measure to gradually develop and upgrade the levels of socio-economy of all ethnic groups” (Lao 1991: art. 8 *emphasis added*).<sup>44</sup> Notably, the main stated justifications of resettlement are the provision of services to remote ethnic villages together with the eradication of swidden.

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<sup>43</sup> The land and forest allocation program, as a precursor to resettlement, has been used to impose restrictions on shifting cultivation and promote permanent agriculture. It will be discussed in more detail in the pages that follow.

<sup>44</sup> In 2001 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) summed up current policy on ethnic minorities as centring on strengthening “national sentiment” and solidarity among different groups for the benefit of the “greater Lao nation,” “realizing equality among all minorities,” improving their living conditions and expanding ethnic capacity to participate in national affairs. This was to be accomplished through land allocation and “halting shifting cultivation,” a re-orientation of subsistence economies toward the market and “*permanent livelihoods*,” and expanded education, health and other benefits (UNDP 2001:64). Notably the wording *permanent* in reference to the livelihoods, agriculture and settlements of upland ethnic minorities has often been interpreted to mean resettlement.

Nevertheless the altruistic intent of state actions has been questioned by development practitioners and researchers, who accuse authorities instead of using resettlement to extend control over and assimilate ethnic minorities, while dispossessing them of resource-rich territories (Da Silva 09 June 2006; World Bank 2004:11; Ireson and Ireson 1991:933-934). The state's motivations, both obvious and covert, will be dissected in greater detail in the pages that follow, although this examination is somewhat handicapped by limited information on individual ethnic groups in the country (World Bank 2004:5).

### **Women: Duties, disparities and discrimination**

Nowhere is this dearth of ethnic-differentiated information more apparent than in studies of gender rights, relations and roles in Lao PDR (World Bank 2004:7; ADB Participatory 2001:67); rather, past research has tended to either ignore gender altogether, draw meta-conclusions or concentrate on the experiences of women from dominant lowland groups, while perpetuating generalizing descriptions of upland minorities. For instance, it has historically been accepted that Lao Loum women have the greatest say in decision-making, more involvement in the market and more control over household finances, in part because of matrilineal inheritance. Daughters will in turn inherit, as it is they who are responsible for the care of aging parents (Lao-LWU 2004:15, 27). In contrast, a World Bank study (2004) on gender, poverty reduction and ethnic groups concludes: "many minority or indigenous women find themselves living within traditional and largely patriarchal societies which dictate that the woman is subordinate to the man" (13).

However, because gender roles are culturally determined they can and do vary broadly between ethnic groups (ADB Participatory 2001:70). Notably the World Bank suggests that

the Khmou, the largest midland Mon-Khmer group,<sup>45</sup> enjoy “a reasonable gender balance” (2004: 20). Economically this balance translates to Khmou women having access to household funds (Ireson 1996:91), but as Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black (2004) argue, their “economic activity does not seem to extend very far into the commercial arena” (151). For Lao Seung women, the family structure is thought to be even more patriarchal (Japan 1999:4). Writing on the Akha, Cohen and Lyttleton maintain that “male dominance and privilege is reflected in the domestic, political, ritual/religious, and economic spheres” (2002:6). The experience of Hmong women is similar and while they are key contributors in all areas of agricultural production, most are said to have little control over household finances or the sale of surpluses (Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black 2004:153).

Across ethnic divides, the government has warned that “deeply entrenched gender stereotypes” continue to impact the advancement of women in Lao PDR (UNIS 2005). Some gains have been made in recent years, but in general the reality for women and girls in the country remains one of continuing inequalities within the family and fewer opportunities relative to men, including in employment, remuneration, market access and education (UNDP 2001:19-20; Lao-LWU 2004:11).

In paid positions it is the informal sector that offers the most accessible opportunities to women (Chamberlain 2000:5); but even as industrialization blossoms and young women are present in growing numbers in the service, garment and manufacturing sectors (ADB 2004:x), concerns have been raised that they are often confined to low-skill work, are discriminated against by employment policies and are typically paid less than men (Lao-LWU 2005:48, 51-21).

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<sup>45</sup> And the most predominant group encountered in my fieldwork.

And to what extent rural women are able to avail themselves of even these marginal opportunities in the face of demanding domestic duties is unclear. It is widely recognized that women play major roles in ensuring the livelihoods of both families and communities (Lao-LWU 2004:3; World Bank 2004:32). Workloads have in turn been disproportionately heavy on girls, and together with the cost of supplies, distance, ignorance of the importance of educating females and low Lao language literacy, have had a profound effect on education, especially for ethnic minorities (UNDP 2001:20-21).

Nor do women often receive income-enhancing agricultural extension, credit or market training, something that is again most true of minority women, who are constrained by their remoteness and inability to speak Lao (ADB 2004:xi, 7, 31). In 2000, as a result, 87 per cent of unpaid family workers were women (Chamberlain 2000:5).

Not surprisingly the disparate poverty experienced by Lao's ethnic minorities is even more pronounced in the case of minority women and girls. This has led the ADB to label them "the most disadvantaged segment of Lao society" — disadvantaged by the double risks of discrimination and exploitation that they encounter as women and as ethnic minorities (qtd. in World Bank 2004:7, 12).<sup>46</sup>

From the beginning the GoL has ostensibly embraced gender equality through a number of national policies and international agreements,<sup>47</sup> including recently the Law on the Development and Protection of Women, which sets out that the state shall create "every condition conducive to the enjoyment of equal rights by men and women" (Lao 2004:4).

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<sup>46</sup> The Mon-Khmer, of which the Khmou are a subgroup, have been singled out as the poorest of all Laotian minorities.

<sup>47</sup> International commitments include the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Trafficking Protocol, while nationally the 1991 Constitution also guarantees equality for women (Lao 1991:art. 22, 24).

These conditions, according to the gender strategy of the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES), include extension and credit for female farmers, enhanced participation, gender-disaggregated monitoring and literacy/numeracy training (ADB 2004:16).

But even the state's own agencies have concluded that "there is a significant degree of 'gender blindness' in the government/project services" and that in practice women "are often ignored in livelihood development programme strategies"<sup>48</sup> (Lao-LWU 2004:3-4). Numerous infractions on women's wellbeing have resulted from the resettlement process; not least among them is a heightened risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004: 52, 56; Lyttleton 2005:27).

## **Development-induced Displacement and Resettlement**

Resettlement has a long history in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Racked for decades by internal fighting and the spillover of hostilities from neighbouring Vietnam, war-time displacements affected more than half the nation's villages. Nor did peace bring an automatic return home; instead the lasting effects of American bombing and defoliant runs and the Communist victory in Vientiane continued to dislocate populations for years to come. While some relocation to agricultural cooperatives occurred in the early years after 1975 (Goudineau 1997:11-13, 24), it wasn't until the 1980s that development really began to determine resettlement — at least in rhetoric.

In the years since, the scale of both projected and actual population movement has been massive. As an outcome of the First National Forestry Conference in 1989 it was

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<sup>48</sup> Participation of highland women in development programs has been constrained by lack of exposure to outsiders, illiteracy and language difficulties (Japan 1999:4; Cohen and Lyttleton 2002:6; ADB 2004:x).

announced that 900,000 people, or one-quarter to one-fifth of the existing population, were to be permanently resettled as a means of stemming the ongoing deforestation that the GoL attributed to shifting cultivation (Evrard and Goudineau 2004:938; Morales 13 June 2006). Because resettlement plans have been kept largely confidential (Garcia<sup>49</sup> 20 June 2006), no one can accurately say how many have actually been displaced; however Action Contre la Faim (ACF) contends that hundreds of thousands of upland swidden farmers were resettled under pre-2001 plans (Gonzales et al. 2005:9). The first phase peaked in the mid-90s after a landmark study by Yves Goudineau alerted donors to the shocking impacts of early displacements, but was reactivated after the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2001 as a way to achieve key government objectives (Morales 13 June 2006); and an estimated 211,000 residents of the 47 poorest districts were reportedly included in resettlement plans for 2001-2005 (Gonzales et al. 2005:5). Less is known about current plans, but there is evidence that government-sponsored resettlement is continuing in some parts of the country (USDOS 2010).

Calling the effects of these relocations mostly “disastrous for people and communities” Baird and Shoemaker (2005) note that contrary to alleviating poverty they instead have often contributed “to long-term poverty, environmental degradation, cultural alienation, and increasing social conflicts” (3); and Da Silva warns that as available land dwindles in the lowlands, conditions for resettlers are getting worse (09 June 2006). Ultimately all provinces have been affected, but due to a combination of factors<sup>50</sup> the North has been hardest hit (Morales 13 June 2006).

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<sup>49</sup> *Not his/her real name.* Alan Garcia is a member of the NSO community in Lao PDR.

<sup>50</sup> Including opium, heavy use of swidden agriculture, high poverty and the predominance of ethnic minorities.

## **Motivations & Mechanisms**

Despite the numbers displaced and the devastation caused, there was no policy on resettlement in Lao PDR until recently (Goudineau 1997:17).<sup>51</sup> Instead the approach of the state has been to coerce cooperation by enacting policies to make upland life unlivable. This has been achieved through implementation of anti-swidden restrictions under the Land and Forest Allocation Program (LFAP) and opium eradication, in tandem with promises of services under focal site and village consolidation strategies (Lyttleton et al. 2004:54, 56; Da Silva 09 June 2006).

Nor has a single pattern defined displacement and resettlement. Ethnic minority communities have moved as one or in stages, to the lowlands and to roadsides, to new areas close to ancestral territories or to distant districts, to ethnically-distinct sites and increasingly, to mixed villages (Goudineau 1997:16, 18; Chazee 1998:15). Resettlement has also been marked by both involuntary displacement — including through the use of violence and intimidation (Da Silva 09 June 2006) — and quasi-voluntary displacement. Yet, Alton and Rattanaovong explain that even in instances of semi-spontaneous migration from the uplands, movements are mostly brought about by “a policy-induced Malthusian squeeze” on livelihoods (2004:44).

The motivations of the GoL for enacting these restrictive policies are complex and often intertwined. Overtly, the state is first and foremost driven by an obsession with eradicating shifting cultivation — for the conservation of upland forest resources and the intensification of permanent agriculture. Relocations that have followed the destruction of

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<sup>51</sup> The Decree on Compensation and Resettlement was passed in 2005, yet it has been the subject of criticism, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

opium fields have also been tied to these efforts, as poppy is a swidden crop (Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:7). Finally, resettlement has ostensibly been undertaken to provide small, scattered upland villages with services and market access. However, a number of less altruistic impulses are also guiding the hand of the state. These motivations and the policy mechanisms that make them possible will each be discussed in more detail.

**The Eradication of Swidden Cultivation:** Language calling for the eradication of shifting cultivation has permeated official documents since at least 1983<sup>52</sup> (Da Silva 09 June 2006). Demonized for its perceived role in deforestation<sup>53</sup> and watershed destruction (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:6-7; Vandergeest 2003:53), swidden is ultimately seen as a barrier to improved productivity in the agricultural and forestry sectors, and hence to rural development and national growth (Lao 2004:53).

Internal resettlement has been a key strategy in efforts to eliminate swidden (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:7), as is evident in a resolution of the 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress which stated: “peoples whose livelihoods depend on shifting cultivation must be settled in areas where they can be allocated land to earn a living” (qtd. in Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:3). In practice this was pursued indirectly through the Land and Forest Allocation Program<sup>54</sup> which “imposed severe hardships” by drastically reducing the amount of land available to upland swidden cultivators (ADB Participatory 2001:xv; Baird and Shoemaker 2005:15). Farmers were in turn forced to cut fallow periods to an average of only three years, which has led to

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<sup>52</sup> Including, but not limited to, the Hmong Policy, the 4<sup>th</sup> National Socio-Economic Development Plan (1996-2000) and the Medium Term Socio-economic Development Plan up to the Year 2000 (UN-ILO 2000:6; Goudineau 1997:15).

<sup>53</sup> Forests in Lao PDR declined from 17 million ha in 1940 to 11 million in 1993 (Rasul and Thapa 2003:496). The state has since responded with a plan to increase cover to 70 per cent by 2020 (Gilmour and Tsechalicha 2000:4). Whether or not this plan includes tree plantations in former ethnic minority territories is not known.

<sup>54</sup> By 2002 the LFAP had been completed in 60 per cent of all farming households (Alton and Rattanavong 2004:33).

weed and pest infestations, soil degradation, and significantly decreased yields. With few remaining options, upland communities “feel obliged to follow government recommendations to resettle” (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:13).

Yet Baird and Shoemaker, among others, insist that “swidden agriculture has been unfairly blamed for forest destruction, and wrongly faulted as an unsustainable form of agriculture” (2005:7).<sup>55</sup> This is supported by claims that rotational swidden, given sufficiently low populations and long fallows, can generate high yields, especially when viewed as a return on labour (Da Silva 09 June 2006); while a number of studies suggest that the loss of forests can be better attributed to intense and unregulated commercial logging (Douangsavanh et al. 2003:80; Robichaud et al. 2001:24). Nonetheless, in practice the state's approach has been universally restrictive against all forms of swidden agriculture (Evrard 2004:4).

Consequently, as Evrard and Goudineau stress, the history of recent resettlement in Lao PDR gives “the impression of a kind of ‘schizophrenic’ state, focused at the central level on the eradication of slash-and-burn agriculture but unable at the local level to deal effectively with the consequences of the large-scale resettlements that have occurred” (2004:954).

**Opium Eradication:** The same can be said of opium eradication efforts. Historically produced in the high mountains, opium is used both as a medicine where few others exist and as an important source of income for some Lao Seung minorities in times of rice shortage. Poppy cultivation had long been tolerated by the GoL, which recognized that a relatively small amount was being exported and that rural development was a necessary precursor to

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<sup>55</sup> Pioneering cultivation can be damaging to the environment, but this form of swidden was practiced by only a few Tibeto-Burman and Hmong-Mien groups (Da Silva 09 June 2006; Goudineau 1997:9).

eradication (Gonzales et al. 2005:15; Baird and Shoemaker 2005:8); but in 1996, in the face of rising pressure from the United States and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the state prohibited opium production and in 2001 a resolution of the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress promised its total elimination by 2005 (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:8; Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:6)

The state's approach to achieving this goal has been deemed "draconian" (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:2) and has included the destruction of crops (Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:11). The GoL subsequently declared Lao PDR "opium-free" in June 2005 (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:10). While it is now clear that the state was overly hasty in making that announcement,<sup>56</sup> Lyttleton et al. stress that the "near-eradication of opium over such a short period has placed a heavy economic burden on highland communities" (2004:32). Unable to cope in the face of absent or inadequate attempts to introduce livelihood alternatives (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:2, 9) and amidst continuing pressure to stop swidden, the response of many poppy growers has been to spontaneously relocate themselves or to accept district resettlement plans (Gonzales et al. 2005:15; Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:13).

**Service Delivery:** A major motivator for many minorities has been the promise of or perception of services or economic opportunities in resettlement sites (Goudineau 1997:19; Lyttleton et al 2004:22). Without road access — and as a result of lowland biases in the provision of support — health, education, agricultural extension and other services have been minimal in the uplands (Douangsavanh et al. 2003:82-83); although ethnic minorities were often quite adept at drawing on their surroundings and balancing multiple livelihoods

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<sup>56</sup> A 2010 report noted that opium was still being grown in parts of Lao PDR ("Luang Namtha").

to avoid real poverty (Seidenberg et al. 2003: 72, 75, 78), at least before the imposition of swidden restrictions.

Nonetheless, from the mid-1990s the Focal Site Strategy (FSS) was promoted as the most efficient way of providing cost effective services to remote communities (Alton and Rattanavong 2004:34; Goudineau 1997:16).<sup>57</sup> By 1998, 62 focal sites had been created, combining 1,026 villages and 320,000 people (Lao-SPCRD 1998:18). As conceived, these communities were to have been the sites of significant financial investment (Lao-SPCRD 1998:20), including in electricity, credit, agricultural extension, transport and social services (UN-ILO 2000:7). Not coincidentally, they would also provide access to markets and allow the integration of a subsistence population into the cash economy in line with national objectives (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:10). Yet in practice the delivery of development services in focal sites was hampered by a shortage of funds, the absence of proper guidelines and poorly trained staff (UN-ILO 2000:17), leading to suggestions that the promise of services was merely propaganda to persuade minorities to move (Gonzales et al. 2005:14).

Re-titled in response to donor backlash, village consolidation, as it is now known, has intensified amidst growing donor/GoL emphasis on poverty alleviation (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:12). Operating on a smaller scale than the FSS, it is not clear how many people have been resettled under this scheme; however Baird and Shoemaker argue that it is often “even more disruptive to livelihoods and cultures... [when] different ethnic groups are forced or coerced to consolidate into single villages” (2005:13).

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<sup>57</sup> Ties with anti-swidden strategies were also apparent in official documentation on the FSS (Lao-SPCRD 1998:13)

**Ulterior Motives:** Thus, despite the rhetoric of rural development that surrounds resettlement in Lao PDR it is increasingly obvious that it is not necessarily motivated for the good of the people. Instead, critics insist that the gaining control over remote ethnic groups and their resource-rich territories are central motivators of both historic and recent resettlement in the country (Da Silva 09 June 2006; Garcia 20 June 06).

Early efforts targeted “politically suspect minority groups” (Ireson and Ireson 1991:933), chief among them the Hmong, who were singled out for their cooperation with the American forces and their organized resistance against the Communist government. “All of the other ethnic groups just got caught up with them,” Da Silva maintains (09 June 2006).

The absence of administrative controls across the uplands also made them targets (Da Silva 09 June 2006), as did national growth strategies, which labeled their upland subsistence lifestyles as “impairing growth” (Gonzales et al. 2005:23). Resettlement became a way to integrate ethnic minorities financially into the national economy and socially into the dominant Lao culture, in the name of nation-building (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:2, 10-11; Morales 13 June 2006). Yet the World Bank warns that resettlement-related policies may be “erasing their existence as ethnic minorities” (2004:11).

They may also be erasing any right of return. Baird and Shoemaker are among those who note that resettlement is at times motivated by commercial interests who, together with the GoL, see in swidden agriculture “competition to the commercial forestry sector, which includes large-scale logging and tree plantations” (2005:2, 6). Newly-vacated uplands are

further coming under threat from mining, rubber and hydroelectric projects (Garcia 20 June 2006; Da Silva 09 June 2006).

## **Section Two: Resettlement Impacts**

Whatever the motivation, inadequate planning, faulty implementation<sup>58</sup> and insufficient funding<sup>59</sup> have played central roles in the shortcomings of contemporary resettlement in Lao PDR, with ACF charging that “hardly any assessment is carried out to evaluate the potentialities [of resettlement sites] beforehand” (Gonzales et al. 2005:15, 26).<sup>60</sup>

The result has been likened to the conditions encountered by refugees and ACF maintains that “the first years following the resettlement are generally characterized by a brutal degradation of the living condition of the population involved” (Romagny and Daviau 2003:17). Thus rather than alleviating poverty, as the government promised, resettlement is exposing ethnic minorities to new “poverty and exploitation” (Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:21; Gonzales et al. 2005:9). This conclusion has been reached by a growing body of researchers. Baird and Shoemaker stress that “to our knowledge, there is not a single study reporting that resettlement has benefited indigenous ethnic communities in Laos” (2005:3); and although conditions have improved somewhat with time, challenges have continued to hamper the adaptation of resettlers (Romagny and Daviau 2003:3).

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<sup>58</sup> For instance, reviews of the LFAP process, and of the resettlement that has followed, have laid blame on the haste with which land allocation has been pursued (which has limited participation and accuracy), on the absence of qualified government personnel, and on corruption in the distribution of land and moving expenses (Morales 13 June 2006; Da Silva 09 June 2006; ADB *Poverty* 2001:xvii; Evrard 2004:2-3).

<sup>59</sup> Nearly 80 per cent of the public investment budget during the height of resettlement came from international donors (Lao 1997:30-31), but only 12 per cent of the funds needed for rural development in 1996-2000 were actually raised (UNDP 2001:48).

<sup>60</sup> ACF notes that despite the state’s adherence to OCHA’s (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in World Bank/ADB sponsored projects, they have been ignored in relocations in Long District, Luang Namtha (Romagny and Daviau 2003:9).

Consequently, “many of those impacted can be expected to be impoverished long into the future” (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:2).

The following insights are by no means exhaustive, but instead establish some of the key physical, economic and socio-cultural impacts encountered by resettlers in Lao PDR over both the short and long terms.

## **Physical Impacts**

**Mortality and Morbidity:** The most immediate impact has been a staggering spike in mortality rates in the first years after the move — 3 times as high as other lowland communities and reaching up to 20 per cent in worst hit communities (Gonzales et al. 2005:4, 16). Luang Namtha, in particular, has seen serious outbreaks of diarrhea, water-borne diseases, respiratory infections and malaria (Romagny and Daviau 2003:17). This has stemmed in large part from a severe decline in sanitary conditions in resettlement sites, amidst a marked absence of potable water, emergency health services and vaccination programs<sup>61</sup> (Cohen 2000:188-189; Gonzales et al. 2005:16). Cohen and Lyttleton challenge that “these shortfalls combined have led to high levels of human misery” (2004:19). This is evidenced in increases in psychological disorders (Romagny and Daviau 2003:17).

## **Economic Impacts**

**Land Shortages and Food Insecurity:** Food insecurity has been a major consequence of declining land access in resettled communities (Gonzales et al. 2005:17). In extreme cases no replacement land has been allocated at all (Da Silva 09 June 2006). More

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<sup>61</sup> The absence of vaccination programs is marked for both humans and livestock (Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:19).

pervasive, however, is the provision of inadequate land, with land particularly scarce for later migrants and biases evident in the smaller holdings of newcomers, relative to established residents or those with kin or government links (Garcia 20 June 2006; Alton and Rattanavong 2004:46; Cohen 2000:186-187). To this Da Silva adds: “the land that’s left almost always has something wrong with it” (09 June 2006), which has prompted criticism of local officials for failing to prepare resettlement sites. The most common complaints are of poor soil quality and the absence of irrigation schemes (Pholsena 2003:14).

These conditions have prompted some displaced communities to return to the uplands, while others have relocated themselves a second time in search of a more favourable environment (Evrard and Goudineau 2004:948, 951).<sup>62</sup> For those who stay yields have declined sharply and according to the ACF, output is usually low or even non-existent in the first year (Romagny and Daviau 2003:9; Gonzales et al. 2005:17). These production problems can also persist (UNDP 2001:34). The wealthiest of migrants may be able to purchase supplemental paddy land, but few others have the capital or time to develop their degraded allotments, which require considerable labour and between three and five years to ensure food security (Gonzales et al. 2005:17; Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:16). These delays are compounded by the lack of experience of upland cultivators in paddy techniques and the dearth of assistance, inputs and water access (Romagny and Daviau 2003:17).

Villagers have responded by using their savings to purchase food, selling livestock and relying on swidden fields, despite ongoing fallow constraints<sup>63</sup> (ADB Participatory 2001:

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<sup>62</sup> Garcia warns spontaneous relocation has been damning for project planning in receiving communities (20 June 2006).

<sup>63</sup> Short fallows in the lowlands are already causing soil depletion and falling yields (Alton and Rattanavong 2004:109).

xv-xvi; Evrard and Goudineau 2004:950-951). Many have also drawn on available natural resources, both as food and as a source of cash in the new market economy. This has caused dwindling supply of NTFPs, compounded in some areas by the presence of outside commercial interests, like logging. With inadequate efforts toward conservation, Alton and Rattanaovong warn, “sustainability is tenuous” (2004:13, 18, 29, 71, 82, 109).

**Decapitalization and Debt:** Yet even with these stop-gap measures, the expense of resettlement has been extreme (Alton and Rattanaovong 2004:52-53).<sup>64</sup> All resettlers have been impacted over the short term; and with little evidence of compensation apart from small amounts of rice in some instances<sup>65</sup> (Romagny and Daviau 2003:16), resettled households have been forced to shoulder alone the expense of rebuilding. Losses include land, houses and unmovable assets (like fruit trees and livestock) in the uplands, transportation expenses and the costs of constructing a new homestead and developing land in the lowlands (Gonzales et al. 2005:16; Alton and Rattanaovong 2004:89-90; Goudineau 1997:26).

For many families, decapitalization is ongoing and impoverishment has become a long-term reality of resettlement. Livestock sales, together with further losses owing to epidemics, have devastated a major source of livelihood for rural women (Goudineau 1997:26; ADB 2004:14). In addition, Lyttleton and Cohen contend that the cost of purchasing land is a financial burden that displaced households may never overcome (2004:22).

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<sup>64</sup> Associated costs have reached as high as \$1420 USD in Luang Namtha (Alton and Rattanaovong 2004:52) — an astounding sum given that the average GDP/capita in the country was only \$2039 USD in 2005 (UNDP 2007:231).

<sup>65</sup> Assistance has been far from uniform, but when given most often involves transportation, food aid or building materials (Goudineau 1997:25).

Yet amidst land delays and constraints, the need for cash has risen sharply in the lowlands,<sup>66</sup> and in lowland Luang Namtha — where non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are no longer in plentiful supply — the income generated from cash crops, livestock sales and off-farm employment was not sufficient to cover these new expenses (Alton and Rattanavong 2004:40, 42, 112-113).

**Service Constraints and Delays:** In a stark reversal of the rationalization for focal sites, the services that could help ease livelihood shocks in consolidated communities are often either limited or absent all together (Alton and Rattanavong 2004:14; Gonzales et al. 2005:4). Da Silva further maintains that because government resettlement plans are not subject to donor oversight<sup>67</sup> “there has been no site preparation whatsoever” (09 June 2006).

Where available, long delays have plagued the delivery of veterinary, education, extension, public health, water and other services; and in many instances access to these services has been subsequently constrained by language difficulties and cost (Gonzales et al. 2005:16; Alton and Rattanavong 2004:67, 117). With school access being one factor in village consolidation, the effect of postponed or discontinued education in the wake of resettlement, particularly among young women, is especially noteworthy (Alton and Rattanavong 2004:37, 76, 117). Agricultural assistance and non-formal training for adults has also been lacking, or provided solely in the Lao language, and resettlers have all too

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<sup>66</sup> More than half of all purchases in Alton and Rattanavong’s study were for food, 10.8 per cent for clothing, 4.1 per cent for housing, 9.5 per cent on healthcare, and 3.8 per cent on education (2004:42).

<sup>67</sup> And much development infrastructure that has eventually been provided in resettlement sites is the product of special projects by NGOs and the labour of the people, not the efforts of the state (Alton and Rattanavong 2004:68-69, 117).

often been left to their own devices in the transition to paddy cultivation and wage labour (Alton and Rattanaovong 2004:37, 69, 76).

**Gender Roles and Responsibilities:** How women are coping with these shortfalls is far from clear and as a whole, research in Lao PDR has been deficient in its attention to resettlement's gendered impacts. The ADB (2004), however, emphasizes that in response to stresses, "women are the main 'shock absorbers' in rural households and rely on various coping strategies to meet the food and other basic needs of their families" (81).

To this end several studies have noted that gender roles are changing amidst economic, social and cultural transformations in new villages (Gonzales et al. 2005:4; ADB 2004:31). Katu women, for instance, reportedly expressed that their rights and status had improved after they moved, as was reflected in more equality, opportunities for education, greater interaction with the outside world and a stronger role in both household and community decision making; and in Luang Namtha, there is some evidence that women's workloads were lightening in communities privileged with sanitation and water services (Alton and Rattanaovong 2004:62, 99).

However the general consensus is that women, especially girls, continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of productive and domestic duties (ADB 2004:7); and in some communities the household tasks assigned to women have increased significantly in the wake of resettlement (Morales 13 June 2006).

**Labour Reliance and Competition:** Outside obligations are also mounting and amidst land and service shortfalls in the new cash economy, some resettled populations are

becoming increasingly dependent on off-farm work to survive (Romagny and Daviau 2003:18; Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:16). This shift from “a perceived unsustainable [subsistence] livelihood to a ‘permanent’ occupation” is in line with the plans of the state, say Gonzales et al. (2005:17), and resettlement is providing a readily-available pool of labour for select foreign investors (Da Silva 09 June 2006).

Yet these “permanent occupations,” which usually take the form of day labour for more well-off ethnic groups or Chinese agribusiness, are often characterized by exploitative conditions, low pay and a lack of security that requires would-be workers to seek employment day by day (Fernandez<sup>68</sup> 27 June 2006; Romagny and Daviau 2003:18; Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:16-17, 22); and as communities have swelled with continuing village consolidations, labour supply is outstripping demand (Lyttleton 2005:23).

There is conflicting information on women’s access to employment. In the Northwest, Chinese businesses may prefer to hire young women (Sayavong 2006:28). Others indicate that men have an advantage because women are too shy to repeatedly ask for work once denied, are already over-burdened, and are less likely to find agricultural work appealing (Lyttleton 2005:23; Fernandez 27 June 2006). For some resettled youth, the absence of options has provoked a “new exodus” to urban centres (Gonzales et al. 2005:18).

**Markets and Exploitation:** Also fitting with official plans is the cultivation of cash crops by some resettlers, who may be encouraged by the state, NGOs and foreign investors (Alton and Rattavong 2004:40, 57, 59, 96).<sup>69</sup> Notably there have been some cash crop

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<sup>68</sup> *Not his/her real name.* Cristina Fernandez is an official of the Government of Lao PDR.

<sup>69</sup> Because of constrained land and capital access, others have nothing to sell, even where new markets have been made available (World Bank 2004:30).

successes, especially in the Northwest, where the Chinese market is close at hand (Lyttleton et al. 2004:22, 28-29); but ACF argues that this “forced” inclusion in the market economy is not without significant challenges and warns that villagers “become dependent on different economic dynamics that they cannot control” (Gonzales et al. 2005:21). Subsistence lifestyles have left resettlers largely isolated from lowland markets and in the absence of training, Lao literacy, knowledge of markets and independent access to credit and inputs, exploitation is common (Sayavong 2006:21; Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:22; Fernandez 27 June 2006).

### **Socio-Cultural Impacts**

Especially where resettlement has mixed diverse ethnic communities, the effect has been one of “dramatic deconstruction and restructuring of upland Lao societies over very short periods” (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:6). This integration, Sayavong (2006) explains, is “forcing many to adopt new ways of life... and roads, markets, and access to modern communication are opening the rural population to a new world for which they may not be well prepared” (5). Changes are most profound among young people, who “need only a few years to adapt to their new environment,” while the older generation may be more reticent (Gonzales et al. 2005:18).

**Materialism and the Market Economy:** One impact of mixing highland and lowland populations through resettlement has been the exposure of former subsistence groups to an unprecedented range of material goods. Set amidst a wider culture of increasing modernity, “the progressive integration, physical and mental, of villages and villagers into

the mainstream has created the context where the pressure of needs is continually intensifying... [and] a sense of insufficiency, paucity and dearth is being mentally and experimentally created” (Rigg 2003:5-6). New expectations are often most acute among young people, who find access to consumer goods hard to resist, and so support resettlement (Evrard 1997:14-15); but in these settings there is a real danger of all values being reduced to market values (Castro<sup>70</sup> 30 October 2006), as already seems to be the case in parts of Lao PDR, where “household cash income is increasingly becoming important” and livelihood systems are being monetized (Alton and Rattanaovong 2004:62, 72).

**Socio-cultural Marginalization and Conflict:** Consolidation of upland villages into existing communities or crowded areas has also intensified the marginalization of ethnic minorities (Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:1), with conflicts over land, water and natural resources becoming common in the dealings of newcomers with other resettlers or established residents (Alton and Rattanaovong 2004:48-49).

And while Da Silva maintains that in the uplands many ethnic minorities wouldn't consider themselves to be poor because of their natural and cultural riches (09 June 2006), Evans (2000) notes that even small wealth differentials in mixed communities “are enough to assert small status differences” (130-131). This can be aggravated by the tendency of the state to combine wealth-maximizing and -minimizing groups, like the Hmong and the Khmou<sup>71</sup> (Lugo<sup>72</sup> 1 September 2006).

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<sup>70</sup> *Not his/her real name.* Fidel Castro is a UN official.

<sup>71</sup> Lugo notes that the Hmong are “go-getters” and have done well in relation to their rural Lao Loum and Lao Theung neighbours, whereas the latter have tended to take only what they need to get by (1 September 2006).

<sup>72</sup> *Not his/her real name.* Fernando Lugo is a researcher working on Lao PDR.

However social status is also tied to the inability of many minority groups to speak Lao and the prejudices of receiving communities about minority cultures, intelligence, addictions and perceived “laziness.” Evans’ study of resettlement into a Black Tai community showed that locals viewed Sing Moon wage labour with contempt and that this stigma was internalized by the Sing Moon, who relocated themselves out of the village and sought work elsewhere as a way of removing “the relationship of dominance and subordination.” Yet despite this resistance, Evans argues that the Sing Moon exhibited little confidence in their own culture and instead sought to raise their status by adopting the material culture of the Black Tai (2000:128-130, 139-140).

**Socio-cultural breakdown and adaptation:** Dubbed “Laoization” (Ireson and Ireson 1991:925), the cultural adaptation of resettling ethnic minorities has been both superficial and meaningful. The former is reflected in the growing adoption of lowland dress, food and housing; but more alarming are findings that meaningful customs have been curtailed in consolidated communities (Alton and Rattavong 2004:58, 91, 115). Equally distressing is evidence of “uncertainty and psychological insecurity, of disillusion and trauma” (Gonzales et al. 2005:17); subsequent examples of social imbalance or breakdown include declining community cohesion amid constrained resources and labour competition (Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:23), and growing anonymity that lessens social controls on behaviour (Da Silva 18 June 2006).

**Family conflict and distance:** Social relations within the family have similarly been altered (Alton and Rattavong 2004:111). This has resulted from, *inter alia*, the

geographic separation of kin groups amidst land shortages and staggered resettlement (Morales 13 June 2006), rising domestic violence and addictions<sup>73</sup> (Cohen and Lyttleton 2002:8, 10, 17, 19), and new mental distance as families become less connected than they used to be (Da Silva 18 June 2006).

Notably, inter-generational conflict is especially increasing, and is frequently born of “the lack of acceptance of the traditional ways by the younger generation” who instead embrace the ideal of modernity (Alton and Rattavong 2004:111). However at the same time, Da Silva cautions, they are also keenly sensitive to the stigma of being poor and an ethnic minority in mixed communities, so are easily dissatisfied (18 June 2006). In this context exposure to education and the modern world can open the minds of young people to life beyond village; but as Garcia warns, it is also opening them up to the risk of sexual exploitation (20 June 2006).

**Sexual Exploitation and Sex Work:** This exploitation is particularly evident in the manipulation of liberal sexual traditions post-resettlement; and in some Akha and Kui communities the breakdown of traditional structures has allowed outsiders to take advantage of a custom of providing sex to visitors from the same ethnicity by bribing village youth leaders (Morales 13 June 2006; Cohen and Lyttleton 2004:20). Subsequently, Lyttleton notes, “local Akha women are [also] beginning to exchange sex for money... reflecting the ascendancy of cash as the currency of exchange” (2005: 27).

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<sup>73</sup> Youth are also impacted by family addiction and could react by leaving home, Da Silva warns (18 June 2006).

The presence of other resettled minorities in sex work is also on the rise. This is often rooted in new consumerism, yet as Lugo sums up:

“Everyone wants these TVs and stereos and motorcycles, but it’s hard to get cash, especially if you’ve been relocated, and your needs... are costing more and more at the same time your income is going down because of the impact of the resettlement. If you want to have those luxury goods then prostitution is one way to get it and maybe the only way” (1 September 2006).

The advent of relative poverty, combined with naiveté, unequal development and socio-cultural changes have proven a dangerous combination for resettled women and girls, who have been found to be vulnerable to trafficking for sex work (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:56).

Yet Molland has also raised the prospect that absolute poverty could be driving resettlement-related trafficking risks (29-30), while Morales notes that land shortages have likewise pushed young resettled women into sex work (13 June 2006). In this regard the absence of reserve land for young people to inherit is an emerging concern, particularly for poor families with small holdings (Lao-MAF/LSFP 2000:46; ADB 2004:68). With limited options for a local future young people are increasingly looking outwards; and among young Sing Moon physically resettled into a Black Tai village, out-migration is growing. Life in the lowlands had exposed them<sup>74</sup> for the first time to the outside world and after moving on to larger urban centres, they felt there was “little for them to come back to” (Evans 2000:134). The determinants and changing context of sex work in Lao PDR will be explored more in the next chapter.

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<sup>74</sup> Through material goods and the media.

## **The Way Forward**

*While knowledge of links between resettlement and sex work is expanding, this chapter clearly shows that the challenges and changes of DIDR in Lao PDR can influence young women and their families in complex ways. The next chapter will look for additional insights in existing understanding of the push and pull factors that drive sex work and migration more generally in Lao PDR. It will also highlight potential risks that young resettled ethnic minority service women could face as the sector evolves along with the country.*

## **New Directions?**

### **Contemporary vulnerabilities in sex work**

It was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and with the Siamese conquest, that reports of trafficking for sex work first emerged from what was is now known as Lao PDR. In the aftermath of war, Laotian women became spoils of victory and were transported to Thailand to serve in the harems of high officials. At that time and later in the early years of French rule, the absence of prostitution in the country itself was such that the colonizers were *forced* to import sex workers. It was only after the conscription of Laotian males in 1945 that the local trade really began to flourish; and as the militarization of Laos boomed in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, so too did the number of brothels (Ngaosyvathn 1995:49, 51-52).

The Pathet Lao reversed this trend after 1975, and under the Communists sex work was firmly repressed and service women sent to remote rehabilitation camps (Lyttleton 1999:120). However in recent years sex work has once again seen a resurgence. This revival began in the early 1990s, in the wake of the opening of the country, and for a time remained indirect and subject to heavy penalties — but within a decade, enforcement relaxed and the local sex sector began to liberalize and grow (Bachelet<sup>75</sup> 16 June 2006). Today even small district centres boast competing venues for commercial sex.

In the following pages I examine the evolution of Lao's sex sector in more detail, to plot both the push and pull factors that are known to drive decisions to migrate, and

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<sup>75</sup> Not his/her real name. Michelle Bachelet is a member of the NGO community in Lao PDR.

potential new risks. This chapter responds to the dearth of knowledge on the intersections of DIDR and sex work, globally and locally.

## **Section One: The Sector & the Trade**

### **Changing Directions in Internal Sex Work**

In many ways the contemporary sex sector in Lao PDR still operates in sharp contrast to that of its notorious neighbour to the South (Mugrditchian and Jenkins 2002:17-18) and in much of the country the legacy of past reprobations<sup>76</sup> have continued to disguise sex work (Lyttleton 1999:121). Classic brothels are rare or non-existent and the sector instead operates out of relatively discreet beer gardens or smaller beer shops, nightclubs and sometimes hotels, with service women commonly playing the role of hostess (FHI 2003:6; Lyttleton and Amarapibal 2002:515; Mugrditchian and Jenkins 2002:10).

In this model sex is not absolute, but negotiated. These negotiations are often facilitated through the consumption of copious amounts of alcohol, with service women encouraging clients to drink and conversing, dancing and drinking along with them<sup>77</sup> before retiring for sex (Lyttleton 1999:121-124; Lyttleton and Amarapibal 2002:515).

As a result of this “courtship” the sex sector in Lao PDR has come to be defined by a number of unique characteristics, including limited numbers of partners. In 2005 an expansive study of 600 service women found that only 2 per cent had had sex with 31 or more men in the previous month, while 29.4 per cent had just 4-5 paying partners and 27.6

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<sup>76</sup> Prostitution remains officially illegal in Lao PDR, but according to Bachelet, fines or arrests are rare (June 16, 2006). In recent years the state has occasionally taken a more prohibitive stand in response to the threat of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) or high-profile political events, yet Lyttleton (1999) contends that these moves are more about lowering the profile of commercial sex in the country than truly curtailing the sector (126-127).

<sup>77</sup> The use of methamphetamines is also increasingly common in some areas, like Houy Xai (AEFSIP 2005:7).

per cent had 6-10 (PSI 2005:21). These numbers are a far cry from a 2004 *Asia Times* report that service women in Oudomxay were selling sex to as many as 10 men a night (Hoenig 2004), although admittedly not enough is known about sex work in that province<sup>78</sup> and regional differences have at been times stark (Mugrditchian and Jenkins 2002:14).

And as the country modernizes, emerging evidence suggests that commercial sex is changing in what is a gradual — and potentially dangerous — coming of age. This is most obvious in the growing number of commercial sex establishments throughout Lao PDR, but especially in urban and border areas and along main transportation corridors (Mugrditchian and Jenkins 2002:18). Venues are also becoming more fluid — visible solicitation can now be witnessed on the streets of Vientiane and, more alarmingly, around some remote road construction sites, boat landings and bus stations (Chamberlain 2000:21).

In this context concern is increasingly centring on the possible development of a high-volume, low-cost sex sector, with the Northern provinces particularly thought to be at risk (Bachelet 16 June 2006; da Silva 18 June 2006). These concerns are being fueled, among other factors, by a widening range in the comparatively high fees traditionally commanded by service women in Lao PDR. In 1999 Lyttleton reported that rates for sex commonly ranged between \$20-40 USD (1999:123); yet fees have also been recorded as low as \$2 USD (FHI 2003:17) and \$5.50 USD, the latter for truck drivers (Mugrditchian and Jenkins 2002:14).

Such a sector would typically be more exploitative. In 2000, Chamberlain emphasized that service women were “always free to choose whether or not to go with a customer” (26).

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<sup>78</sup> AFESIP has called the Oudomxay capital “quite liberal on sexual exploitation” (2005:6). It is a source of concern among public health NGOs because of the growing presence of Chinese in the province, a demographic that has been linked to the rise of low-cost, high-volume sex work elsewhere (Bachelet 16 June 2006).

This is no longer the case and in the recent Population Services International (PSI) survey, 23 per cent revealed that they had been forced to have sex at least once by commercial partners (2005:14); and while some members of the development community continue to downplay the threat of internal trafficking, based on the perceived absence of brothels, a key study has recorded internal trafficking from all provinces, with residents of Huaphanh and Xieng Khouang provinces, as well as the Khmou and Tai Deng (Lao Loum) minorities, disproportionately vulnerable (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:35-36).

Clients are commonly businessmen or government officials, but are also migrant workers, local men, truck drivers, military and police. Their nationalities vary, with white-collar clients typically ethnic Laotians first, followed by Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese. Clients from construction camps are likewise both local and foreign (Mugrditchian and Jenkins 2002:14, 22; Chamberlain 2000:14).

The ethnic composition of service women varies by location, although overall Lao Loum sex workers have been found to outnumber those from the minorities (PSI 2005:20). Ethnic minorities, conversely, predominate among service women in the North (Chamberlain 2000:15, 26; Lao-MoLSW/UNICEF 2000:12), with the Khmou especially well-established in the sector (Chanthalangsy 2006:3).

Increasing ethnic diversity among both clients and service women is being monitored with concern for its potential to contribute to a high-volume sex sector. Such a situation, contends da Silva, “evolves most rapidly when people don’t speak the same language and don’t get the same pleasure out of chatting” (18 June 2006). At present, ethnic minority

service women tend to be confined to the low end of the trade, and most choose to work out of beer shops (Ortega<sup>79</sup> 20 June 2006).

Many admit to being underage,<sup>80</sup> which has similarly been singled out as cause for alarm; and as Bachelet notes, the younger they are, the more easily taken advantage of they are (16 June 2006). Tan further found that of the 47 per cent of her study participants who were minors, most originated in the Northern and Central provinces (2006:1,3).

For these young women sex work is generally not considered a lifelong occupation (Khonthapane 2000:4). Instead, many service women use the experience to try to earn money for future opportunities, such as setting themselves up as hairdressers and tailors or running a small shop (Lao-MoLSW/UNICEF 2000:20; Tan 2006:8). Alarmingly, some also mention the dream of one day opening their own beer shops (Chanthalangsy 2006:4).

Their movements are similarly transient; women may stay as little as one month at a given shop before moving on (Correa 27 June 2006). Departures are motivated by any number of factors, but especially by declining clients or unfavorable conditions (Da Silva 18 June 2006). This professional mobility is moreover often associated with distance, as service women rarely stay in their home province or district (Lao-MoLSW/UNICEF 2000:12).

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<sup>79</sup> *Not his/her real name.* Daniel Ortega is a member of the NGO community in Lao PDR.

<sup>80</sup> At the same time legal age restrictions may cause girls under 18 years to try to disguise this fact (Chanthalangsy 2006:3).

## External Trafficking and Migration

Notably it is the movement of women and girls *from* Lao PDR that has drawn the most official attention. This thesis will not focus on external trafficking or migration ending in sex work, except to draw insights on vulnerabilities, particularly where they intersect with resettlement. Yet, some context is in order.

According to Ginzburg (2002) “migrating for work is a fact of life in many Lao villages” (3).<sup>81</sup> This is most true in provinces and Lao Loum communities bordering Thailand, although some migration occurs to both China and Thailand from the Northern provinces, where most migrants were ethnic minorities (Toledo and Fujimori<sup>82</sup> 12 September 2006). Markedly, migration from the uplands is thought to be very low (Garcia 20 June 2006) and few of the trafficking victims surveyed by researchers in a major study in 2004 were found to be from especially remote communities (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:8).

Amidst this exodus the number of victims of human trafficking<sup>83</sup> from Lao PDR is unclear, but an estimated 35 per cent end up in forced prostitution, with Tai-Thai (Lao Loum), Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman women and girls disproportionately vulnerable (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:8, 18). Nor are there any reliable figures on Laotian women working voluntarily in Thailand’s sex industry, but the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) notes that a “significant proportion” of migrants, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, become sex workers (2004:18).

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<sup>81</sup> The overall scale of emigration from Lao PDR is underscored in the UNDP’s most recent National Human Development Report, which noted that 10 per cent of the labour force were working and living in Thailand (2006:75).

<sup>82</sup> *Not their real names*. Alejandro Toledo and Alberto Fujimori are members of the NGO community in Lao PDR.

<sup>83</sup> The joint UNICEF-UNIAP (United Nations Inter-Agency Programme on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion) TRACE Project estimates, based on a series of calculations and assumptions, that nearly 22,000 people were trafficked from rural Laos to Thailand between 1994 and 2004 for sex work (2004:68).

## **Section Two: The Drivers of Sex Work and Trafficking in Lao PDR**

The Lao Women's Union (LWU), a quasi-ministerial body, has declared trafficking risks to be intrinsically linked to chronic poverty, insufficient employment or livelihood options, and inadequate training or vocational skills (ACWO 2003:5); however the GoL has seemingly done little to address the root causes of sex work *within* the country,<sup>84</sup> which evidence suggests are more and more grounded in the state's chosen development track — including resettlement and road construction — and the influence of the modernization that has accompanied it. This section will examine both these emerging vulnerabilities and more established drivers of migration for sex work or trafficking in and from Lao.

**National Development Policies, Resettlement and Sex Work:** Notably an important study of external trafficking by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOLSW) has cautioned that with the opening of the country to market forces, “opportunities for development are great, but so too are the risks for the largely rural and poorly educated population” (2004:11). These risks are already being realized in the transformation of the sex sectors and as Lyttleton reports, “the loosening of overarching state strictures on economic development has prompted an increase in the number of women working in drink shops and nightclubs, and the number of men feeling both financially and socially able to exploit such interactions” (1999:120).

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<sup>84</sup> There has been some support for research related to road construction, but the GoL has both edited reports on resettlement and sex work and has suppressed reports that discuss internal trafficking.

A number of specific policies are contributing to these increases, including on the demand side: growing numbers of foreign male travelers, resulting from the opening of the border to trade (Lyttleton and Amarapibal 2002:513); major dam and industry projects, which have been accompanied by an influx of thousands of foreign labourers; and the creation of a series of new regional linking highways, which are projected to dramatically increase transit by high-demand groups, like truck drivers or Chinese and Thai tourists (Mugrditchian and Jenkins 2002:19-20; Da Silva 18 June 2006).

On the supply side, sex sector participation has been affected by the extension of rural roads, which bring the risk of “exploitation and victimization” to the doorsteps of poor families (Chamberlain 2000:1), and by resettlement.

Evidence on the role of resettlement is brief, but stems especially from the work of James Chamberlain, Chris Lyttleton, Paul Cohen and associates. As was introduced in Chapter Two, Lyttleton and Cohen have highlighted the increasing use of service women by resettled men and the growing presence of resettled women in the sex sector, linked in some instances to the exploitation of the liberal sexual traditions of resettled ethnic minority groups by outsiders after displacement (Lyttleton 2005:27; et al. 2004). While this research has been most illuminating in relation to the Akha and Kui populations (Lao Seung), Colom<sup>85</sup> also notes that the participation of some Khmou women in sex work is related to relocation (10 March 2005).

Crucially, a growing body of evidence is also linking resettlement to trafficking risks. A 2009 report by the ADB found that residents of relocated villages were most prone to migrate, with Mon-Khmer women, including the Khmou, especially vulnerable to

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<sup>85</sup> *Not his/her real name. Alavaro Colom is a researcher working on Lao PDR.*

trafficking (33). Earlier, a second research team under Chamberlain's direction also revealed displaced ethnic minority women and girls, and specifically Khmou and Tibeto-Burmans, to be disproportionately at risk. This was attributed to naiveté and unequal development, but was also seen as stemming from the desire of daughters to increase their family's social status and livelihoods, as well as socio-cultural changes in resettled villages that intensified the risk of family breakdowns. The latter has manifested in rising rates of drug addiction in some new communities and a loss of control over the actions of children amidst a climate of tremendous change (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:41, 52, 56).

These findings have prompted the NGO Acting for Women in Distressing Circumstances (AFESIP) to call for more research on the links between trafficking, relocation and ethnic minorities (2005:4). However, further insights have been limited by the political sensitivity surrounding the association of resettlement with sex work in Lao PDR. In the absence of a comprehensive explanation of the experiences of the resettled women and girls who have entered the sex sector, it is essential to draw on the data and debates generated by studies of mainstream migration, sex work and trafficking.

**Relative Poverty, Modernization and Consumerism:** It is increasingly obvious that *absolute poverty* is not the ultimate precursor to sex work or trafficking in Lao PDR. To be sure, numerous trafficking victims do share a history of financial distress and deprivation (Phetsiriseng 2001:15; Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2000:4), and economic growth has been blamed for worsening socio-economic inequality, with disparities especially between ethnic groups and the sexes (Chamberlain 2000:9). In this regard poverty was found to be "critical" in motivating service women from the ethnic minority-dominated

North<sup>86</sup> (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2000:23). Yet poverty comes in many forms. For instance a major cross-border trafficking study concluded that few victims came from backgrounds of extreme poverty (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:8). Similarly Khonthapane's (2000) study found that while income poverty, or insufficient household funds for extras like school fees and transportation, may have been a factor, few migrants for sex work in Vientiane were considered poor by national standards (3).<sup>87</sup>

More common is the link, articulated by the TRACE (Trafficking from Community to Exploitation) project, "between poverty, feelings of poverty, and consumerism"<sup>88</sup> (UNICEF/UNIAP 2004:38). The advent of relative poverty in Lao PDR is multi-faceted, but its roots spring from individual experiences of modernization; and "as the village becomes increasingly *connected to the world*, electricity, road access, and television influence peoples' way of life and perceptions" (UNICEF/UNIAP 2004:25).

In this altered context, material goods have become the new symbol of modernity (Jagdeo 14 June 2006); but as AEFSIP warns, traditional agriculture is unable to support growing consumer demands, so "life in the villages is more and more focused on cash... and how to acquire it" (2005:5). The centrality of cash is reinforced by respondents in the AFESIP database, 60 per cent of whom said their primary reason for becoming service women was to "make a lot of money" (Chanthalangsy 2006:4). Amidst these growing

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<sup>86</sup> In contrast, only 27 per cent of those surveyed nationally for the AFESIP database indicated that they had become sex workers to support their families (Chanthalangsy 2006:4).

<sup>87</sup> Garcia notes that while the poorest may want to migrate they may not be able to afford transportation (20 June 2006).

<sup>88</sup> The importance of consumerism is reinforced by numerous studies, which argue that migration that leads to trafficking is frequently independent of economic well-being (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:51; Phetsiriseng 2001:35, 37). In other instances the greater incomes and opportunities that come with development may actually increase migration because they raise expectations (UNICEF/UNIAP 2004:38).

expectations, migration is often seen as “the only possibility to generate financial income” (UNICEF/UNIAP 2004:25) and acquire more “modernity” (Jagdeo 14 June 2006).

This trend can be attributed in large measure to the growing reach and “superficial and consumeristic” messages of Thai television, which Uribe<sup>89</sup> insists have had “a runaway train impact on local culture,” youth attitudes and migration (19 June 2006). In addition to fueling material desires, television has also created “romanticised images<sup>90</sup> of foreign places” (UNICEF/UNIAP 2004:38), which comes head to head with the desire of some young people to explore new frontiers (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:9-10; Wille 2001:19). Boredom in home villages can add to this curiosity (Uribe 19 June 2006).

Migration can moreover be viewed in tandem with modernity as a means to a better or easier life, and as an escape from perceived hardships through access to conveniences like electricity, roads and nicer homes, along with consumer goods (Sayavong 2006:26; UNICEF/UNIAP 2004:25-26; Khonthapane 2000:5).

Alarmingly, this modernization-inspired migration has in many parts of the country become a self-renewing cycle. The return home of service women — with modern clothes and sought-after material goods — prompts significant inequalities in wealth and social status in their villages, placing pressure on other youth to follow suit (Jagdeo 14 June 2006). However, with little worldly experience or skills, the often uninformed migration that results has left would-be migrants open to exploitation (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:20; Wille 2001:12, 40); a danger that is compounded by the tendency of returned

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<sup>89</sup> Not his/her real name. Alvaro Uribe is a member of the NGO community in Lao PDR.

<sup>90</sup> Together, Lao PDR’s proximity to and underdevelopment relative to advantaged neighbours like Thailand is a visible temptation that makes young women vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:7-9).

migrants to relate only positive experiences (UNICEF/UNIAP 2004:27; Phetsiriseng 2001:37).

Nonetheless, departures are usually voluntary and linked especially to the influence of friends (Sayavong 2006:7; Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2000:17-18). Bar owners may offer commissions (Fernandez 27 June 2006; Mujica 04 July 2006), but there is little reliable evidence on how often this occurs, or on other possible motivations of these supposed “friends.”

**Family Pressure, Need and Problems:** The role of family in sex work has been a topic of major misinformation throughout the region, fueled by sensationalist news reports of drug-addicted highlanders selling off their daughters (Castro 30 October 2006).

In stark contrast, pressure from families is rarely considered key in pushing Laotian children to seek work in Thailand, and a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that as many as 50 per cent left without their parents’ consent because they knew it would not be forthcoming. Nonetheless for another 40 per cent the decision to migrate was jointly influenced by parents and children (Wille 2001:2, 21-22); and while active coercion is present in some cases, Jagdeo argues that more often, families don’t initially know their daughters have become sex workers or stay quiet despite their opposition, as it brings in income for the household (14 June 2006).

In this regard the committee overseeing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has warned that the obligation of Laotian girls to support their families by sending money home may force them into settings of sex work (UNIS 2005:19); little is known about how or if this obligation differs among ethnic

groups,<sup>91</sup> although a MOLSW/UNICEF child sex work study reported that the need to support families is more common among service women from the ethnic minority-dominated North; but again, defining “need” leaves room for confusion, as the same study appears to include within its explanation of “economic necessity” money for family survival and to improve lifestyles (Lao-MoLSW/UNICEF 2000:4, 12, 15).

Nonetheless family “need” is a frequently stated motivation of young service women (UNICEF/UNIAP 2004:26; Chanthalangsy 2006:4). A wish to appear the dutiful daughter may, however, colour the validity of some such responses; and Wille points out that of the 89 percent of respondents in her study who said they wanted to support their families, only 38 per cent actually sent remittances home (2001:2, 21).

While the lack of remittances by Wille’s sample might in some cases be explained by factors like debt bondage,<sup>92</sup> other potential justifications for the failure of young migrants to maintain family ties include the fact that nearly 50 per cent of the service women surveyed by a MOLSW-UNICEF team shared a history of family problems (2000:19). Migration may also be about freedom from hard work, and some sex workers have expressed resentment that their parents didn’t appreciate their labours at home (Jagdeo 14 June 2006).

Cutting across all of these motivations, Wille argues, is the reality that migration is now so entrenched in parts of Lao PDR that it operates “progressively [and] independently of

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<sup>91</sup> Or among broken families, as the same study reported that only 68 per cent of the young women it surveyed had grown up with both parents, compared with the Lao average of 92 per cent (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2000:4).

<sup>92</sup> Da Silva suggests that “voluntary” debt bondage is common in Lao PDR, wherein service women take advances on their earnings to purchase clothes, but usually are not confined as has been the case in Thailand (18 June 2006).

the factors which have originally caused it” (2001:27). Notably, migration from the uplands and remote areas is still thought to be limited (Garcia 20 June 2006).

**Education, Employment and Vulnerability:** Whether or not constrained access to education is one of these factors is debatable in the Laotian context. AFESIP warns that there are huge variations among the country’s sex workers “according to ethnic groups, gender and provinces,” with service women from the North typically less schooled than those from the South or Centre (Chanthalangsy 2006:3; 2005:4). However, at least two studies have concluded that ethnic minority sex workers had either reasonable or higher than average education — and indeed, education may be necessary for the courtship-like interactions of commercial sex in Lao PDR<sup>93</sup> (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2000:23; Chamberlain 2000:15, 17).

The influence of education on trafficking is even less certain amidst contradictory evidence. Only 23 per cent of female trafficking victims in the MOLSW/UNICEF 2004 study had completed primary school — a rate nearly 2.5 times lower than the national average (19) — whereas many in a survey focused on the South had at least reached that level. Their vulnerability, Phetsiriseng stressed, stemmed from lack of access to *higher* education, as secondary schools were often some distance away from villages (2001:27, 33-34, 45, 50).

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<sup>93</sup> By way of perspective, only 18.3 per cent of all Laotian women and girls went beyond primary school in 2002/2003, while 31 per cent had no schooling at all (UNDP 2006:8).

Sayavong ultimately sums up the paradox of education and vulnerability:

“It is impossible to state categorically that a higher education level would reduce the migration rate; we can nevertheless expect that better access to schooling within the village would at least delay the decision to migrate and give young migrants a stronger capacity to avoid risks and exploitation while they are abroad.” (2006:10)

But this is complicated, Wille argues, by findings demonstrating that education is not a priority among Laotian youth, who feel they have better prospects to earn money in Thailand than as a local university graduate (2001:20). These feelings are made very real by the extremely high dependent population in Lao PDR (55 per cent of all Laotians are under 19 years old), and with few paid opportunities for the 60,000 young people who enter the work force each year many are increasingly looking South (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004:12, 39).

For those that remain in the country, unemployment or underemployment are common (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2000:9), and even where employment options exist, there is some evidence that migration has continued (Chamberlain 2000:8). This irony stems in part from the unattractiveness of agricultural work, especially to young women (Wille 2001:23); but ultimately also because there are “few job opportunities that can provide young women and girls with an income comparable to prostitution” (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2000:4). This is evidenced in findings that factories, particularly those in the garment industry, have been a springboard to sex work (Ortega 20 June 2006).

**Sex & Ethnicity:** Ironically, while some researchers have previously argued that ethnic minority girls are shielded from trafficking by the “fierce guardianship of traditional cultural values” in their communities (Wille 2001:11), there is new and growing concern that certain cultures may be a catalyst to sex work in the current era.

This is especially evident in Lyttleton and Cohen's findings that the liberal sexual traditions of the Akha and Kui are vulnerable to exploitation in the wake of resettlement (Lyttleton 2005:26-27; et al. 2004).<sup>94</sup> Sex at a young age is also common among some ethnic minorities (Jagdeo 14 June 2006) and ultimately Mujica cautions that early experience may socialize girls into sex work (04 July 2006). Fernandez suggests that this may explain the high numbers of Khmou service women in the North (27 June 2006).

However, da Silva is cautious and maintains that little is really known about the presence of the Khmou in commercial sex. Instead he is adamant that different ethnic groups have very different propensities for migration or sex work (18 June 2006), which may relate in part to their capacities to cope with "policy-induced social upheaval" (ADB 2009:24) such as those imposed by resettlement.<sup>95</sup>

## **Bridging the Gap**

*As this chapter has illustrated, the choices of certain young women to migrate are undoubtedly impacted by resettlement, but are also complex and interconnected with modernity, agency, cultural customs and other risks. Together these insights have played a critical role in informing the design of interviews conducted as part of this study, and in enabling contrast and comparison in analyzing both the part that DIDR has played in the participation of ethnic minority women and girls in sex work, and in vulnerabilities they have subsequently encountered in the sector. The following chapter presents the results of that fieldwork, from the perspectives of resettled service women.*

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<sup>94</sup> AFESIP raises concern that in these settings "parents might support their daughter to be in prostitution" (2005:9).

<sup>95</sup> For instance the Hmong, who are rarely found in sex work, are especially resilient, while groups like the Kui and Khmou are less so (Da Silva 18 June 2006; ADB 2009:24).

## **From Resettlement to Sex Work: Plotting the road in between**

Luang Namtha, the site of this research, is a province of nearly unparalleled beauty. Ranges of rolling hills surround its few lush plains, green with young rice and dotted with open-walled huts where farmers seek shelter under the vast and vivid sky. Pairs of Akha women wander dusty streets and it is easy to believe that this is the type of place where traditions hold strong and no one is in a hurry to change.

But the pace of upheaval in Lao PDR's most northwesterly province is far from slow. Once blanketed with primary forest, many of its hills now stand out starkly, denuded of trees by over-logging, cleared to make way for swidden fields, or scarred with the matching horizontal lines that mark just-planted plots of rubber. Trucks speed by on a strikingly out of place stretch of blacktop — a leg of the new ADB-financed North-South trade corridor, which winds through Luang Namtha from the Northern border with China. South of the capital, bulldozers churn mountains into mud in a rush to finish the section of the highway that leads first to Bokeo province and then to Thailand beyond.

Resettled villages along this and other roadways are likewise muddy and barren, and children scatter as passing vehicles impatiently sound their horns. Luang Namtha is among the hardest hit of all provinces affected by resettlement.<sup>96</sup> Impacts have included the

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<sup>96</sup> In 2005, both Vieng Phouka and Long in Luang Namtha topped a list of national districts with the highest numbers of resettled people (Gonzales et al. 2005:13), and existing resettlement plans in Muang Long were targeting 50 per cent of upland villages or over 6,000 people for resettlement “without offering any form of assistance or support” (Romagny and Daviau 2003:3).

doubling of mortality rates in resettled villages (reaching as high as 30 per cent in some villages in early years) owing to poor sanitary conditions and new exposure to malaria; food insecurity; land conflicts; and the creation of a landless “proletariat” (Romagny and Daviau 2003: 9, 17; Cohen and Lyttleton 2004: 17, 22). The combined imposition of resettlement and restrictive anti-swidden and anti-opium policies has further fueled a “radical shift” in the lifestyles of affected villagers (Lyttleton 2005:5) and ultimately has led to “social and cultural breakdowns” (Romagny and Daviau 2003:17).

In this context the sex sector is correspondingly changing. Studies by Lyttleton and Cohen, in particular, revealed an alarming new trend of young resettled Akha women selling sex outside Muang Sing nightclubs, and have provided evidence of the growing exploitation by outsiders of Akha and Kui sexual traditions in local resettled villages (Lyttleton et al. 2004:80-89; Lyttleton 2005: 26-27). During the course of this research, brightly made-up girls from remote roadside communities could also be seen soliciting sex at Chinese construction sites and near the junction of key highways from China and Oudomxay. Traditional sites for commercial sex are similarly increasing in number, yet in these more formal settings it is women from other provinces that dominate; and of the 198 service women working in Luang Namtha’s 30 sex venues in 2005, AFESIP reports suggest that most originated in Luang Prabang, Oudomxay, and Vientiane (2005:11).

In this chapter I build on the work of Chamberlain, Cohen and Lyttleton, to improve understanding of both the cumulative impacts of DIDR on young Indigenous and ethnic minority women and the contributions of resettlement-related changes to sex work and attendant vulnerabilities.

## Section One: Methodology and Participants

Primary research took place over five months during 2006. Initial interviews were conducted with 55 service women in three districts of Luang Namtha — Vieng Phouka, Muang Long and Muang Sing. They were assessed using a non-static semi-structured questionnaire that was designed to identify a sample of resettled service women and to yield comparative data on demographics, causes of entry into the sex sector and conditions of work. Assessment interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 1.5 hours. Additional interviews were also carried out with over 28 representatives of development or multi-lateral organizations, researchers, academics, and government officials, as well as with three beer shop owners. Because of the unauthorized nature of the research, extensive discussions with state personnel were avoided.

Of the 55 service women assessed,<sup>97</sup> 11 were conclusively identified as having been displaced by state policies, while another 2 were highly suspected of being resettled.<sup>98</sup> They represented 24 per cent of the sample.<sup>99</sup> Eight of the 13 agreed to participate in longer interviews, which took place individually in multiple sessions over a period of two to three days. These were intended to shed light on the range of realities encountered by the women and their families — in the uplands, post-resettlement and in their current lives as sex

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<sup>97</sup> Each was compensated for her time, in amounts ranging between 25,000 to 140,000 kip, depending on the length of the interview.

<sup>98</sup> Both were Kui and had moved from the uplands of Muang Long to a village that has been identified by Lugo and others as being the receiving site of considerable numbers of relocates (1 September 2006). However language difficulties impeded a full discussion.

<sup>99</sup> It is impossible to say with any accuracy if resettled women are disproportionately present in Lao's sex sector, as no one truly knows the number of resettled persons in Lao PDR. In 1989, 900,000 — or between 20-25 per cent of the population at the time — were scheduled to move (Evrard and Goudineau 2004:938; Morales 13 June 2006). Although it is not clear if this target was ever met (Baird and Shoemaker 2005:7), the percentage of resettled women in this study seems to suggest that they were not under-represented.

workers.<sup>100</sup> In the end, however, only six full “histories” were collected after one shop owner set a restrictive time limit on sessions. These interviews were semi-structured and wherever possible open-ended, but because of the inexperience, young ages, lack of schooling or language confidence<sup>101</sup> of some of the research participants, I was forced to rely somewhat more than was originally intended on survey-style questions.<sup>102</sup> As a consequence, the responses presented here are rather more descriptive than first person. The following chart summarizes some key defining characteristics of the core group:

### Core Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Resettlement</b>
<b>Bounam</b>	21	Kh mou	Xay District, Oudomxay	From Phongsaly in 2003
<b>Voy</b>	25	Phu Noi	Xay District, Oudomxay	From Phongsaly, year unclear
<b>Pouy</b>	18	Kh mou	Nambak District, Luang Prabang	Within Nambak in 2006
<b>Toei</b>	16	Kh mou	Nambak District, Luang Prabang	Resettled twice within Nambak, latest in 2000 or 2001
<b>Souny</b>	17	Kh mou	Nambak District, Luang Prabang	Within Nambak in 2000
<b>Kanthong</b>	16	Kh mou	Nambak District, Luang Prabang	Within Nambak in 2000

<sup>100</sup> Neither survey is attached here in part because of length, but also because questions evolved in response to the replies of participants. Furthermore, all interviews took place in the Lao language, through the use of an interpreter.

<sup>101</sup> The core participants claimed to be between 16 and 25 years old, but may have been younger.

<sup>102</sup> Researchers from AFESIP reported similar problems conducting interviews (2005:4) and another study noted that service women in the area didn't have a lot of experience speaking about themselves (Sayavong 2006:20).

Questions specifically explored the following considerations: conditions in original villages (which are presented comparatively throughout this chapter), the context of resettlement and displacement; compensation and assistance (including replacement land); decapitalization; recapitalization; future sustainability; changes to education and workloads; exposure to new economic and socio-cultural contexts and related impacts on status, feelings of relative poverty and consumerism; family details, relations and obligations; increases in dating, sexuality or exploitation by outsiders; the influence of established out-migration and friends on decisions to migrate; trafficking, deceit and conditions of sex work; and the use of sex work incomes and future plans of resettled service women.

The insights into the resettlement experiences of young Indigenous and ethnic minority women that follow are primarily based on the responses of the six who participated in in-depth interviews. Five of the six were Khmou (Lao Theung); one was Phu Noi (Lao Seung).<sup>103</sup> Four of the Khmou service women hailed from the Nambak District of Luang Prabang Province, while the other two were originally from different districts in Phongsaly, but were resettled in two communities in Muang Xay, Oudomxay Province.<sup>104</sup>

Where relevant, this chapter also draws on initial assessments with the remaining displaced service women, and to a much lesser extent, on the experiences of non-displaced service women. The names of the women and villages have been changed to protect their anonymity and to uphold the confidentiality promised in the consent process.

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<sup>103</sup> The remaining resettled women were: three Khmou, three Kui and one who identified herself only as Lao Theung.

<sup>104</sup> Of the larger sample, 38 were Lao Theung (including 35 Khmou, 1 Lamet), 5 Lao Seung (2 Phu Noi, 3 Kui), 8 Lao Loum (including 3 Lue and 1 Tai Deng) and 4 of mixed parentage. Several identified themselves only as Lao Loum or Lao Theung. They came from Luang Prabang, Oudomxay, Phongsaly, Bokeo, Luang Namtha, Vientiane and Sayabury provinces, with the highest numbers originating in Muang Nambak in Luang Prabang (23) and Oudomxay (9 from Muang Xay and 4 from Muang Beng).

## Section Two: Findings

**Conditions in Original Villages:** For all six of the core participants, life began in the uplands of Lao PDR's Northern provinces, where they lived amongst their own ethnic groups in small communities, inaccessible to outsiders except by foot. Life wasn't always easy, especially in light of the heavy demands of swidden, but hunger was non-existent in all but one case. Rather, sources of nutrition were plentiful. Three of six families had annual rice surpluses; all had access to the forests for NTFPs, all had livestock — such as pigs, chickens and ducks, although only two households had buffalo — and all sold opium.<sup>105</sup> Several also reported having savings.

There were, however, some geographic differences in upland wellbeing. The two participants from Phongsaly Province both reported harder lives and annual rice shortages ranging from two to seven months. These shortfalls were supplemented by the sale of opium, NTFPs and vegetables like corn, as well as hunting, fishing and collecting fruit, bamboo and other forest products to eat. One, Bounam's family, also relied heavily on the money she and her sister earned clearing land and harvesting in other villages, for which they were sometimes paid in rice; however in all but one of the other communities there was either no paid work available or no perceived need to work off-farm because their families "had enough to eat." Similarly, while many noted that there was still land available around the original villages to expand swidden fields, Phongsaly was again the exception. Villages normally averaged between 40 and 60 households, although in the most recently resettled that number had shrunk due to ongoing sporadic relocation.

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<sup>105</sup> Of the 11 confirmed resettled service women (including 8 of the Khmou participants), all but one admitted that their families had grown opium in the uplands.

Universally, services were limited, and included at best a school (with classes typically only going as far as Grade Two Primary) and in two communities occasional agricultural assistance and monthly visits by a mobile health team. None of the villages had road access, with several located as much as a day's walk away from the nearest roadway, and all reported a lack of clean water, which for one became a driving force behind villagers agreeing to be relocated a second time.

**Context of Displacement/Resettlement:** Common to all core participants was the influence of the state and its agents in constraining already-limited livelihood options in their original villages, and ultimately in curtailing the long-term viability of life in the uplands. Anti-swidden dictates were universal and included de-designating farm land — Pouy's family lost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their land holdings in this way — and restrictions on clearing new land, imposed through periodic checks and the threat of prohibitive fines — as much as 50,000 kip/tree — if old forests were cut. These practices had the effect of limiting field fallow periods to as little as three years. Although the use of rotational cultivation meant that there was insufficient time for reduced fallows to adversely affect yields prior to relocation, one woman acknowledged that her family knew that if they remained in the uplands, their harvests would eventually decline.

Opium eradication policies were particularly powerful and affected the villages of all six core participants. Between 1997 and 2005, poppy crops in their villages were uprooted — either without warning or within a year of being told to stop — or villagers were threatened with future fines if planting continued. In at least one instance this policy impacted savings, and without opium revenues Pouy's family were forced to sell two

buffalo to meet their upland expenses. A Kui service woman, who was resettled within Luang Namtha, explained the dilemma: “if we don’t grow opium in the uplands, we don’t know how to make money.”

In this context several families complied almost immediately with the official demands to stop swidden farming and to move. A few were eager to relocate, enticed by promises from officials of paddy and services — clean water, roads and electricity were especially appealing — or by the tales of those who had moved before. The fear of a Hmong threat was also exploited in the resettlement of Kanthong’s village and the government warned that the lack of soldiers to protect them made them vulnerable to attack. Others resisted for several years, but as one service woman reasoned: “we knew we would have to go one day and everyone else was going, so we left.” That sentiment was reflected in reality, and in four of the six main cases a majority of the original village’s households moved at or around the same time. Not all of those who moved together stayed together, but families typically did, with four of six participants either moving as one with relatives or joining cousins that had moved previously, even if that meant foregoing the benefits of a specially created resettlement village.

Among the 11 confirmed resettled women, all but three were relocated between 1998 and 2003, with the family of only one core participant moving recently, in 2006, just five months prior to her becoming a sex worker.<sup>106</sup> Distances to new villages ranged from a few kilometres to hundreds; from within the same district to displacement across provincial borders, notably between Phongsaly and Oudomxay.

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<sup>106</sup> Two others moved in 2005 and 2006. They were not interviewed in depth.

**Compensation and Assistance:** Despite the distances and the dearth of roads, only one village<sup>107</sup> was assisted with travel arrangements. Others had to make their own way, forcing four of the participants' families to sell or give away at least part of their rice harvests or livestock prior to leaving. None were given any official compensation for the assets they left behind, although two women suggested that their parents were able to sell some land to neighbours who had decided to remain in the uplands.

Nor were new communities prepared to receive them, and just one family had a house waiting — albeit one that was too small for all of its eight members. Instead, those being resettled rebuilt at their own expense.<sup>108</sup> For some the result was more basic than for others, as was the case with Toei, whose family took just one day to construct a new house.

Promised paddy land was in similarly short supply. Of the three families that were allocated paddy within a month of their arrival, all had relatives already established in the village. The others waited between one and two years. When it was finally productive, most described the paddy as inadequate on its own to meet family needs — Bong's family of 14 received only ½ of a hectare, while the paddy provided to Toei and Pouy's families produced only enough rice for half the year — and two criticized the quality of the land and the lack of irrigation. Notably, two service women<sup>109</sup> who were relocated to the lowlands later than most, respectively moving in 2005 and 2006, said that their families were not given paddy land, but rather had to buy it.

Tensions over land were present in roughly half of the core cases, instigated by both the

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<sup>107</sup> The village was ostensibly relocated because of a perceived risk of attack by Hmong insurgents, and its residents received more assistance than any other, including those that relocated into the same community. This assistance included food aid for a period of five months, partially completed houses, corn, rice and vegetable seeds, and training.

<sup>108</sup> One participant said they kept the cost low by cutting wood themselves, and so only had to buy tin.

<sup>109</sup> From among the group of resettled service women that were assessed only briefly.

original owners and those that didn't yet have their own land. Voy and her family stopped farming their paddy for a year due to a combination of pressure from other landless Lao Theung residents and malaria.

In this context only Kanthong and Bounam's families were given short-term food aid, while several relied on donations from relatives. Four of six also cleared new swidden fields, although land for expansion was reportedly already scarce. The availability of services measurably improved over the uplands, especially in the area of education, but infrastructure was still far from complete in new villages, with no communities boasting a health clinic and several marked by delays in the provision of clean water (between two to four years), markets, and electricity.<sup>110</sup>

Just half of the participants' families had official agricultural assistance to help them adapt to paddy farming, but for those who did it variously encompassed training in growing paddy rice and vegetables — and in one instance selling — and sometimes seeds for crops like rice, corn or monton (tapioca).<sup>111</sup> Another village, which had relocated twice at the “request” of the state, was given five cows to share amongst every 13 households.

**Decapitalization:** Without adequate assistance, particularly in the provision of land, compensation, travel support and food aid, decapitalization was at times significant. There was no effort to estimate the value of upland assets, but assets that were left behind

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<sup>110</sup> In contrast Bounam related that the residents of her original village who moved to the resettlement community that was specifically created to receive them (her family chose to move to another community nearby to join cousins) were given: land by lottery, paddy and animal husbandry training, rice seed, and food aid for the time it took to clear land. Construction of a school and clean water systems started 6 months after they moved and work on a clinic began in 2006.

<sup>111</sup> One recipient, Voy, noted that training was conducted to coincide with official checks to see if forests had been cleared, so it is not clear how thorough these learning sessions were. More was learned, she said, with the help of other Phu Noi residents.

included land, houses, fruit trees and livestock. Lost opium revenues compounded decapitalization. While most participants were able to lighten their loads by selling livestock or rice before leaving the original village — as well as in the case of two families, land — it is unknown how closely the money earned by these sales reflected replacement costs in the lowlands. For example, Bounam’s parents sold all of their post-harvest rice in Phongsaly, and used the proceeds to buy back half that amount and some meat in the new village in Oudomxay.

Apart from the cost of rebuilding, food was to be a new expense<sup>112</sup> among rising costs, especially in the interim between relocation and first harvest, and in the face of early land shortages.<sup>113</sup> Most of the core participants reported periods of rice shortage in the first year or two, which were offset by purchasing rice from savings and earnings from wage labour and the sale of NTFPs and livestock,<sup>114</sup> as well as with donations from relatives. However, over the long term the need to purchase food was also compounded by increasing competition for forest products and animals, with several women noting they were no longer able to hunt (enough or at all) in the new village.

Savings and expenses were further impacted by the ongoing loss of livestock in the lowlands, owing to epidemics, poisoning and theft. Five of six families lost chickens or ducks to disease, including Bounam’s parents, who had 200 chickens and 23 ducks die in just one day, six or seven months after being resettled. In the end the family lost birds on three separate occasions before they stopped replacing them. Other losses were less

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<sup>112</sup> Food expenses in the uplands were typically limited to salt, oil and MSG.

<sup>113</sup> Some residents of host communities may have also been vulnerable, and at least two non-displaced service women said their families lost land when their holdings were redistributed following heavy resettlement.

<sup>114</sup> Voy’s family sold pigs to finance the cost of building a new house and purchasing food in the new village, while Souny’s sold a buffalo to tide them over during the first year.

substantial. Socially, as well as economically significant, were the routine thefts of chickens, clothes and vegetables in two communities, and the perceived poisoning of pigs and killing of chickens belonging to Voy's mother.

Human illness was less common, but severely affected the savings of one woman's family, who as a whole suffered malaria and diarrhea in their first year, while her brother had recurring medical problems that required frequent hospitalization, impaired his ability to work and caused the family to go into debt.

None of the other core participants incurred debt, yet spending on luxury expenses potentially compromised the savings of several. Notwithstanding land delays, the families of four of the six core participants bought televisions in the new villages, three within the first two months. As one participant, Kanthong, explained: they spent freely in the days following resettlement because they knew they would have swidden-grown corn to sell after the first harvest, although it didn't come for two and a half years.

**Recapitalization:** As expenses and the need for cash increased, the families of the core participants began to rely heavily on the collection and sale of NTFPs. This was especially true of the first year or two in the new village, when daughters collected as often as 3-4 times/week,<sup>115</sup> or everyday in season, and earned 10-20,000 kip/day from sales. After the newcomers received paddy, trips to the forest became occasional or at least less frequent — as rarely as every two weeks. As one participant explained, they didn't need NTFPs when they had rice, but there were also universal complaints of either difficulty in earning money because of increasing competition from other community residents who were selling,

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<sup>115</sup> This despite the fact that for Bounam the new forest was 10km away.

dwindling supplies, longer distances to forests, or the destruction of forests by new migrants in search of land for swidden and food. Nonetheless, for the majority, NTFPs were the lone reliable source of income during the transition period.

The combination of swidden, for most, and paddy, when it was finally belatedly distributed to everyone, also provided some revenue. Two families boasted rice surpluses, although Toei noted that the entire village's rice crop was impacted in 2006 by a lack of water, and that her family lost  $\frac{1}{4}$  of their annual rice yield.<sup>116</sup> She had earlier expressed concern that yields would fall because a three-year fallow was imposed on lowland swidden.

Four of the six further grew commercial crops for sale, including corn, tapioca, green onions and peanuts, and after three years Toei's family was approached to grow perfume trees. They have yet to receive any money, and neither the terms of the contract nor whether or not any food-crop land was turned over to make space for the trees is known.

Paid work was less common. Two women noted that there was no paid work at all available in the new villages, while three described opportunities as limited, "hard" and underpaid — earning only 10,000 and 25,000 kip/day. Half the participants also noted that boys or men had an easier time finding work because they could "work harder" and had more employment choices — building houses as well as clearing land — while women had difficulty juggling their own paddy and household responsibilities. For instance, Bounam worked briefly on a Chinese flower plantation soon after she arrived and variously thereafter in a factory and on the farms of others, but the amount of work was not

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<sup>116</sup> None of the others from the same community volunteered this information, and as Toei was the last interview, there was no opportunity to follow up. Voy, who was from a different community, also noted that the yield was down in 2006, which prompted local officials to distribute some rice aid.

consistent and conflicted with her time to plant and harvest at home. Instead she and her sister earned a small amount running a basic shop out of the family home and selling clothes on commission in other villages. Voy had only two or three days of work on Lao Seung farms and was subsequently sent to live for much of the next two years with her uncle in Sayabury Province, where she was made to weave from 7am to 9pm, without pay. She said that after returning to her new village, she asked about work in a weaving factory, but there were no openings and she didn't try again elsewhere.

The only exception was Kanthong, who together with her sister and brother-in-law became dependent on off-farm paid labour<sup>117</sup> for two and half years. So extensive was the transformation that she based her perception that life was better in the lowlands on the fact that there was more paid work. She and her family even stopped participating in traditional reciprocal labour exchanges with neighbours — saying there were too many people to help and if they wanted her assistance they would have to pay for it. However, even Kanthong's volume of paid work eventually dropped off to just 12 days/year because of increasing competition. Notably, while there were some paid farm opportunities in the uplands, she and Bounam were the only ones to participate. Several others said that their families didn't have to work because they “had enough” to eat.

The desire for paid work, however, changed in the lowlands and although Bounam noted that she still had enough and didn't have to go out and find work, it was more money: “If I saved 25 years I couldn't have the money I have now.” This monetarization of lifestyles and values was not unusual. Pouy, who never worked prior to becoming a service woman, expressed concern that the money to be earned on other farms or in a factory was

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<sup>117</sup> She was variously paid in rice and wages.

not enough; and, even though she also had no paid opportunities, Toei insisted that life was better in the new village because it was easier to make money. Voy, conversely, knew little about how the money to be earned from farming, weaving or sex work might differ.

Nonetheless, the combination of multiple livelihoods helped the families of three of the participants begin to rebuild their savings, although the cushion was mostly meager, and Voy noted that they had had only 4-500,000 kip in reserves before her brother fell ill and her family fell into debt. Conversely, the families of Pouy and Souny were spending what savings they had.

**Future Sustainability:** These responses raise questions about the sustainability of future life in consolidated communities. As noted above, all participants alluded to increasing pressure on forests owing to widespread reliance on selling NTFPs and encroachment by new migrants in search of land for swidden and food. And while the availability of land for inheritance was not a direct line of inquiry, all noted that there was either no more land to extend fields or that the government wouldn't let them clear new land. According to Voy her village in Oudomxay doubled because of an influx in migrants from Nambak district in Luang Prabang, and in their wakes, no swidden remained. Significantly, Bounam was setting aside money from her sex work earnings to save for land for a beer shop.

**Education, Obligations and Workloads:** Changing labour roles and responsibilities in the wake of resettlement similarly impacted the options and motivations of the young women who participated in this study. Workloads initially intensified for four, owing to a

combination of multiple income earning-activities, including farming swidden and paddy, as well as more frequent forest collection or off-farm work. Many of these tasks fell to daughters. Voy's duties multiplied after her mother stopped helping in the fields, her brother fell ill and her sister married and moved away. Likewise, Bounam and her sister shouldered almost all of the extra responsibilities in the lowlands because her elderly parents could no longer work as much, if at all after resettlement. Yet at the same time as her days were occupied by farming, collecting and selling NTFPs, traveling to other villages to sell clothes, minding the family's shop and periodic work in factories or on plantations, she was witnessing other young people, the children of more established residents, who had "easier lives." This prompted her, she said, to want the same for herself. She and two others further expressed dissatisfaction with farming.

For most, the high time and monetary costs of rebuilding in the new villages also took their toll on education. Of the two participants who were not educated at all in the uplands, neither began school in the lowlands because their help was needed to support the household. Among those that had been previously schooled — years of schooling ranged from between grade two primary to grade two secondary — two stopped attending immediately after resettling, whereas two others continued for a couple of years before dropping out.<sup>118</sup> Their reasons for doing so included increasing workloads, insufficient money to cover costs or the need to use money to survive, lack of motivation, and the disapproval of parents. Even though one noted that younger siblings usually have better access to education, gender disparities were common and despite concerns about expenses,

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<sup>118</sup> Both Souny and Bounam, who continued to attend school in the new village, said the things they learned played a part in them wanting to leave the village.

when sisters dropped out, brothers continued to attend. For a few, this gender bias around education was internalized. In the words of Kanthong: “girls just get married, boys can use it.”

However, after a difficult rebuilding period that lasted up to three years, four participants reported having more free time and “nothing to do” apart from watching television and working — trips to the forest were more rare, school no longer occupied their days and paddy work only consumed a couple of hours per day after it was growing. This level of inactivity was even more pronounced in the case of Pouy, who stopped working completely after arriving in the new village and no longer attended school;<sup>119</sup> and two others said that boredom made them anxious to leave the village and see other parts of the country. For most, though, it was new exposures that spawned this sentiment.

## **Exposure to New Economic and Socio-cultural Contexts**

**Status, relative poverty and consumerism:** From a largely isolated existence in original villages, the depth of exposure to new socio-cultural and economic influences in consolidated communities was profound. Televisions, roads, mixed-ethnicity populations, wealth differentials and material goods all played a part in upsetting the stability of traditional life patterns and built in young women, in particular, a momentum to migrate.

Understanding the upland context is essential to appreciating the extent of change that was experienced. All original villages were composed solely of one ethnicity and only two women had prolonged exposure to different cultures through work in the villages of

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<sup>119</sup> The family, which was resettled in 2006, no longer collected from the forests, didn't work off-farm and didn't open new swidden fields or repurchase livestock, but instead farmed a small plot of paddy and borrowed rice and vegetables from their cousins, purchased a television and lived off savings. It is notable that Pouy also stopped attending school, but did start dating multiple boys. Culture shock seems to have been in play.

neighbouring ethnic groups, attending school outside of the village, trips to market, or interacting with traders and other visitors to the community. Conversely, two of the remaining participants reported never having left their original villages. Roads were as far as a day's walk away and while outsiders semi-regularly came into the villages to trade goods or purchase opium, vegetables and forest products — particularly after the poppy season or around the time to harvest certain NTFPs — few of the participants intermingled with them because of their limited Lao language skills, shyness or young ages. Media exposure was restricted to radio, or none at all.

In contrast, the villages to which they moved or were resettled were larger consolidated communities of multiple ethnic groups, including Lao Seung, Lao Loum and Lao Theung, and several women noted that overnight their people became a minority.<sup>120</sup> Despite their diverse surroundings, for reasons of shyness, language difficulties and tensions over land, nearly all continued to interact primarily with members of their own ethnic groups. Yet they witnessed more people, both in number and ethnic variety, in school, at the market and as a result of their new roadside locations; these included travelers passing by and traders, among them Chinese, who as Bounam explained, came a lot more frequently because the roads were better. Particularly relevant to this study is that Bounam's community also boasted a beer shop — staffed by service women from other provinces.

For four participants, these social surroundings created desires for escape or adventure. Both Bounam and Kanthong said that witnessing young people from other ethnic groups who had more free time, or those whose parents prioritized schooling over work, made

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<sup>120</sup> One consolidated community in Luang Prabang, which became the new home of four of the six core participants, eventually numbered 200 households, as did another in Muang Xay, Oudomxay.

them hungry for greater freedom in their own lives.

More importantly, new economic exposures universally added to the appeal of consumerism, and in most cases created concerns over the perceived loss of status or rise of relative poverty. Status, relative poverty and consumerism were undeniably intertwined in consolidated communities. In the uplands, most reported that the level of wealth was similar within their villages, although in a few instances there were a small number of poorer or richer families. However, in the lowlands wealth differentials were more common and while a couple of participants called their wellbeing “average,” almost all noted that longer-established residents had more — more land, nicer clothes, better houses. This was variably true of Lao Loum or Lao Seung families. Toei said she felt her family lost status for this reason, and Voy just wanted “to have the same, to be the same.” These sentiments were not unique to just the younger generation. To Bounam’s own motivations to migrate were added those of her father. “My dad wanted me to work for money so I could have the same as other sons and daughters,” she explained.

Notably, while newer styles of clothing were admired and craved, it was “big ticket” items that most participants felt would increase their families’ importance. These items included motorcycles,<sup>121</sup> refrigerators, televisions and mechanical plows, but especially houses, and at least four women singled out the size and quality of their homes in comparison to other residents or government officials as a source of feelings of relative poverty and status decline. While most indicated that they were not treated as inferior by

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<sup>121</sup> Bounam used her sex work remittances to purchase a motorcycle for her father and said she thought their importance in the eyes of the community had increased as a result.

established residents,<sup>122</sup> Voy said she felt that a few more established families looked down on hers and if they had nicer things it might stop.

Purchases in the uplands had typically been limited to two or three suits of clothing a year, along with cooking items like salt, oil and kitchen utensils; however, in the lowlands this austerity began to ebb and even during the early, uncertain post-resettlement phase some major material purchases were made at the expense of savings. Larger and more luxurious houses were beyond the financial means of all, but despite land delays, the families of four of the six core participants bought televisions, three within the first two months of being resettled. Others paid 500 kip a few times each week to watch programs at the home of a neighbour. Along with televisions came obligatory expenses associated with electricity or the purchasing of a generator, which ran as high as 1.6 million kip or 10,000 kip/day. Souny acknowledged that her family's savings were now almost all spent.

Yet at the same time, money for other material goods like clothes, which were increasingly visible in the more numerous shops of new communities, was collectively scarce. Voy's family had just 4-500,000 kip to spare each year after expenses, but medicine for her brother took priority. Toei and Souny both lamented having no money to spend on themselves, but said there was none to spare.

In the context of limited incomes, exposure to television had the effect of broadening the appeal of consumerism and the horizons of the participants to a scope that could not be accommodated by staying in the village. Thai programs were especially popular. For three participants, their impacts were far-reaching and prompted dissatisfaction with village living and farming. Instead most expressed desires for a modern life, marked by material

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<sup>122</sup> In the words of Toei, they weren't made to feel backward, but felt it themselves.

goods, freedom, travel and adventure. Bounam imagined that life as a service woman would be similar to the scenes she saw on television because she thought some places in Lao PDR were similar to those that the programs showed. If they depicted her own background, she said she was bored. In contrast Voy said she knew that leaving would not make her life the same as those of the characters she watched, but family needs prevailed.

**Family Dynamics, Relations and Obligations:** Despite commonalities in the resettlement literature around the impacts of displacement on families – particularly those relating to the division of families and kin groups, rising domestic violence, and tensions within households over the changed behaviour and easier adaptation of young people — similar findings were largely absent in this study. Instead, although villages often resettled in stages, extended families tended to either stay together or reunite in the same community, even if it meant forgoing the benefits of a resettlement village. In no case did family relations appear to deteriorate significantly after resettlement and none of the participants reported problems with violence, addiction or undue tensions. There was, however, one example of exploitation by family, specifically the conditions under which Voy was forced to work after she was taken in by her uncle, in the years immediately following her relocation. It is also possible that participants were reluctant to share intimate details of family problems with a virtual stranger.

With respect to altered post-resettlement behaviour, while most of the core participants suggested that they had more freedom to make decisions in the lowlands (something that may also have been a product of coming of age), this freedom was typically limited to dating or going out with friends, actions for which they usually still sought the permission

of parents. Culturally, only Bounam said she tried to act more like Lao Loum youth after her family resettled in a the mixed community — by mimicking their behaviour and accents.<sup>123</sup>

Nonetheless, three of the six left without telling their parents, and even though Voy's mother was aware of her plan to migrate, she still doesn't know that the money her daughter earns is from sex work. Bounam and Kanthong were the exceptions. In the most dramatic case of family complicity, Kanthong's mother arranged for her to go with an "aunt" to a beer shop in Oudomxay and was given 300,000 kip in exchange; while Bounam was completely honest with her parents from the beginning. "They wanted to yell at me, but couldn't, because it was my decision," she insisted. All suggested that feeling obligated to care/provide for their families played a part in their decision to migrate, yet this was not always reflected in practice, as was evidenced in limited remittances in two cases and a later statement by a third participant, Pouy, that she became a service woman for herself and not to care for her family.

Only the women from the poorest households seemed truly motivated to migrate by family needs. This is in part because they shouldered more household responsibilities than others. Voy's older sisters had all married and moved away, leaving her with only a frequently ill brother and an aging mother; and Bounam had just one younger sister to help her care for her elderly and increasingly feeble parents. In all, two of the six service women came from single parent homes. Age also seemed to be factor in vulnerability to migration and four participants were among the older siblings in their families, families that in most cases were quite large, with 6-7 children. As two Khmou service women, and one Phu Noi,

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<sup>123</sup> Modern clothing was another matter and all expressed desires for new styles they saw in the shops and markets.

explained, it is the oldest child that is most responsible for caring for the family, while the younger siblings remain in school. In these instances family responsibilities took a heavy toll. As Bounam recalled: “I wanted to go out and care for myself for a bit.”

Yet mixed responses belied gender disparities in family responsibilities and migration. Three of the Khmou participants seemed to downplay the obligations and roles of daughters, compared to sons, noting that if girls wanted to help they did so by caring for the house or “finding something to sell.” Nonetheless, as several noted, it was they who migrated, at the same time as older brothers stayed in the village and younger brothers continued their education. In contrast, another Khmou, and the lone Phu Noi daughter, said that girls in their communities work harder than boys and are more responsible for providing for family needs. “Boys care from home,” Bounam explained. “Girls go out.”

To this end, some amount of pressure from their parents to not only care for families, but particularly to earn money, played a part in the decisions of nearly all of the core participants. Kanthong was told outright by her mother to “go out and earn money for the family;” but for Bounam’s family the choice was not an easy one as they were torn between wanting her to stay in school, and needing her to earn money to help provide for them as they got older, as well as for her own future. Of sex work, Bounam says: “they wanted me to earn, but not this.”

**Dating, Sexuality and Exploitation by Outsiders:** The most revealing responses on the impact of past sexual experience on decisions to migrate came from three Kui

service women, who were briefly surveyed.<sup>124</sup> In the entire sample of 55, they were the only service women who originally came from Luang Namtha. More importantly, the community to which their families were resettled was identified by two other researchers as having been a site where liberal pre-marital sexual traditions were exploited by outsiders in the wake of resettlement. One of the three, Kham had a child to support, but none would say if non-Kui visitors frequented the community looking for sex or if this played a role in their decisions to migrate.

Among the core participants, dating also reportedly increased after resettlement,<sup>125</sup> although several denied that sex was more accepted, and only one said she had had sex before becoming a service woman. Notably, the majority of Khmou suggested it was common, even in the original village, to date outside of their own ethnic groups. Nonetheless Kanthong related that within three months of her village being relocated, ten girls were penalized for having sex with outsiders. The details of these encounters were sketchy and there was some doubt that they were consensual, but reportedly both the girls and their partners were fined. Conversely, Souny said she and her friends began dating only Khmou boys, but wouldn't say why.

**Established Out-migration, influence of Friends and Deceit:** The influence of friends on the out-migration of the sample, both small and large, cannot be overstated. The same is true of home communities with established patterns of migration, particularly those in the lowlands of Nambak District in Luang Prabang.

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<sup>124</sup> One was quite proficient in Lao, but because of the language difficulties of the others they were unable to reply in much depth.

<sup>125</sup> This increase may partially be attributed to coming of age.

This is in sharp contrast to the upland experience. Apart from Souny, who said boys might leave to help build a house in another community and Kanthong, whose Aunt migrated to Vientiane, none of the other core participants witnessed economic migration from their original villages. In fact, only five of the entire sample of 55 service women had migrated from the uplands and in all of these cases their villages had been targeted by anti-swidden or anti-opium restrictions or had been told to move by government officials.<sup>126</sup>

In the lowlands, five of the six had *seen* other youth migrate and another had *heard of* local young people leaving to find work, so decided she should do the same. Most mentioned only daughters when detailing their past exposures to migration, but Voy and Toei both related broad out-migration that included boys (although they couldn't say in what numbers). These migrants included Lao Theung and Lao Seung, as well as in at least two communities, Lao Loum.

According to Toei, whose own sister had migrated to Vientiane for garment factory work, over half of the 40 Khmou households she knew have had a child migrate. Notably, however, none of these young people had been among those who resettled with her.<sup>127</sup> Bounam reported a similar absence of migration from the resettlement village to which she and her family were to have moved, although in Souny's case, six of 10 families from her original village had a member migrate — five to garment factories and one for sex work.

The power of “friends” or other young people over the movement of the participants was evident both in their original decisions to leave and in subsequent transit between beer

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<sup>126</sup> Significantly, at least three also were accessible by “old” roads, indicating they were not overly remote.

<sup>127</sup> Toei said only that they had been there before, which doesn't rule out that the families of these migrants may have been resettled at an earlier time.

shops.<sup>128</sup> Among the six, all but Kanthong were directly influenced to migrate by friends, cousins or same-aged young people who had been service women before; and three made it clear that they wouldn't have left their villages if their friends hadn't asked them to, or would have gone with them to a factory instead if that choice had been presented. Of the larger sample, no less than 33 reported that friends had influenced their decisions and in most cases they traveled together to their destinations. While reasons for leaving were no doubt complex, basic camaraderie played a part for half of the core group; Toei also admitted that the clothes, jewelry and money of returning service women was a strong draw.

Yet the motivations of those doing the recruiting were less than clear.<sup>129</sup> In some instances these "friends" were exactly that, longtime friends or acquaintances from the same ethnic group. This was the case for four of the six. However at least five in the larger sample admitted that they had only known their "friends" for a short amount of time, which ranged from them having just met, to friendships of one to three months.

And in a majority of cases these friends were less than honest or told half truths about the nature of the work — 22 of 45 service women who answered said they were deceived about what they would be doing — the responses of both samples indicated a blind tendency to follow without question,<sup>130</sup> having often been given little or no information

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<sup>128</sup> Bounam, for instance, knew she was being cheated of commission at one Vieng Phouka beer shop, but choose to stay for 5 months because her friends were not yet willing to move on.

<sup>129</sup> Certainly no one reported having any knowledge of commission fees being paid for girls that were recruited. Other factors might include that those service women doing the recruiting weren't allowed to leave their current beer shops until a replacement had been found, as was the case with a few women from the larger sample; or simply "for friends from home," which Kanthong explained as her reason for wanting to recruit three girls when she next went home.

<sup>130</sup> While several participants in both groups expressed fear of Thailand, having been exposed to public service warnings of the risks of exploitation there, at least one, Kanthong, indicated she would go "if friends asked."

about the type of work they would be doing<sup>131</sup> or the pay they would receive. Only Bounam knew in advance exactly what it entailed to be a service woman. Voy had intended to work in a restaurant, but decided to become a service women after her friend convinced her that it would take too long to earn enough money in more traditional occupations; but it wasn't until they arrived that she understood what it meant to service clients.

**Entry into Sex Work: Is it Trafficking?** Despite this deceit, none of the core participants was trafficked under what is perhaps the most widely publicized conception of the term, one that usually invokes images of closed brothels, debt bondage and complete submission under threat of violence. Certainly, apart from the prior experience of one woman in the larger group, closed brothels were not found in Luang Namtha<sup>132</sup> and instances of debt and violence were extremely rare in the responses of both samples. Yet elements of trafficking were clearly in play. The UN definition is relevant here as it extends to include:

“The *recruitment, transportation*, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of... fraud, of *deception*, of the abuse of power or *of a position of vulnerability* or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation... shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth [above] have been used.” (UNODC 2000:2 *emphasis added*)

As noted above, recruitment and deceit — active and passive — by friends was

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<sup>131</sup> Selling in a shop or selling beer for commission were common explanations.

<sup>132</sup> In this case one young woman maintained that she had been forced to have sex without pay everyday for nearly four month before she left everything behind and escaped. This occurred at a beer shop in Luang Namtha town. Another three reported that the beer shop owners either wouldn't let them leave or didn't want them to leave, with potential movement restricted for at least two of these service women by the fact that the owners controlled all or part of their earnings.

decidedly present, even though there was no indication that payments<sup>133</sup> were made to those doing the recruiting. But more critically, one beer shop owner was complicit in what I argue is the trafficking of at least three of the core group of resettled service women.

While the story of Mrs. Mu is an exception to the responses of the two other owners who were surveyed (both of whom indicated that the supply of young women coming to them outweighed demand), it offers unique insights into the risks young resettled women may face in migration.<sup>134</sup> At the time of this research the shop exclusively employed resettled service women, and its owner, Mrs. Mu, admitted that she never went to the uplands, but instead preferred to recruit resettled girls living along the road. Among the shop's first workers were two Kui girls from a nearby resettled village, who the owner says came to sell beer, but sold sex of their own accord. The owner later started recruiting from Nambak District in Luang Prabang. She typically approached the homes of resettled Lao Theung who told her of the hard times they had encountered when they moved down and related that they were anxious to have their daughters earning money to contribute to such expenses as the cost of a new house or to make up for the shortfall of rice in the lowlands. Daughters too were often keen, she explained, adding that in relocating from original villages, where ethnic dress was the norm, they were exposed to new styles of clothing and other goods, but had no money with which to buy such things. When they were similarly too poor to pay for transport, Mrs. Mu paid for them.<sup>135</sup> Young women and their families were told only that they would be selling beer on commission.

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<sup>133</sup> Money did, however, change hands in the recruitment of Kanthong. In this case her mother was given 300,000 kip by a family friend who later forced Kanthong to have sex with her first client and kept 400,000 kip of the 550,000 she was to have been paid.

<sup>134</sup> There was only one other beer shop where resettled service women were found in large numbers and neither the owner there nor her employees consented to be interviewed in full.

<sup>135</sup> It is not clear whether or not the cost of transport was translated into debt.

Trafficking, however, ultimately hinges on exploitation. While deceit is clear, the systematic exploitation of service women — resettled or not — is less obvious. Mrs. Mu admitted that she considered girls “straight from the village” easier to control, but she maintained that the service women who work for her have the freedom to sell or not sell sex as they wish; this position was echoed by all the beer shop owners who were interviewed. Nonetheless at least 12 in the larger sample and two of the core group said that they had initially been forced to go with clients, among them Souny who shared that the owner of the shop where she previously worked had on three occasions forced her to have sex, for no pay, with police officers and a tax collector.<sup>136</sup>

Freedom of choice at Mrs. Mu’s also appeared to be limited as commissions were paid only once a month, which restricted the departure of two new service women who said that they had no desire to sell sex, but had no other money with which to leave.<sup>137</sup> Generally there was a clear naiveté around earnings, and two of the core participants acknowledged they did not keep track of the money that was owed to them in commissions, while another said she had been routinely cheated of commissions at a Vieng Phouka beer shop.<sup>138</sup> Two others also suggested that they were required to pay a portion of their earnings to the owner, although such payments were not reported by other service women at the same establishment (or others) and may have been associated with confusion over buyout fees or accumulated debt. Yet all but one of the six maintained control over their own savings, with the exception of Kanthong who entrusted her earnings to the owner of the barbeque dog shop in which she worked. The result was that the owner, with whom she says she had

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<sup>136</sup> This occurred at a beer shop in Na Tuey.

<sup>137</sup> With no alternatives Daeng chose to go with a client after a few weeks, while her cousin Toei continued to resist.

<sup>138</sup> This was echoed by other, non-resettled, service women who had worked at the same shop.

a special relationship, gave her money to buy clothes, but not enough to return home.

**Earnings, Uses and the Future:** Most of the non-resettled sample reported median earnings of 100,000 kip or more per client,<sup>139</sup> although some service women noted slightly lower incomes, mostly at two establishments in Muang Sing. The range with resettled service women was similar, although the fact that three of five members of the core group reported the lowest earnings of any of the 55 women surveyed creates some cause for concern. For instance, Pouy said she tried asking for 80,000 kip, but could only get 50,000 even though she was new. Potentially more alarming are the earning experiences of Kui service women; a beer shop owner in Vieng Phouka related problems with Kui service women going with clients for as little as 20,000 kip or nothing at all.<sup>140</sup>

Otherwise, the number of clients the women had were similar, and of the core sample none serviced more than 13 or 14 a month. These numbers translated to maximum core group earnings of 1-1.5 million kip each a month,<sup>141</sup> including commission, tips and fees. Use varied by origin, with the participants from the poorest original backgrounds much more likely to share their earnings with family. For example, in four and a half months as a service woman Voy remitted 3.5 million kip, saved 1 million and used the rest to purchase some make-up and one or two suits of clothing per month, which she said was necessary to attract clients. Much of the money she has remitted was used to pay her brother's medical

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<sup>139</sup> This was the median overnight fee, while several service women explained that they earned just 50,000 kip if they stayed with a client for only a few hours.

<sup>140</sup> A manager from a Muang Sing nightclub where two suspected resettled Kui service women were found noted that he had to collect their fees for them after instances of clients leaving without paying. While no one offered any explanation for this trend among the Kui, language was clearly a problem in Muang Sing.

<sup>141</sup> For the three core participants who had been sex workers long enough to establish income patterns. The exception was Souny, who by virtue of charging only 50,000 kip, earned as little as 500,000 kip/month, not including commissions, which she said she rarely kept track of.

bills and buy livestock. Bounam likewise remitted at least \$1 million kip/month and spent 100,000-200,000 kip on herself. While a portion is being saved for her future, she has also insisted that it be spent on a motorcycle for her aging father, to pay for fixing up the house and to cover basic expenses. Of the remaining four core Khmou participants only two had been service women long enough to establish spending and saving patterns. Nonetheless their experiences differed significantly from those of Bounam and Voy. After five and a half months Souny had earned a minimum of 3 million kip, but had saved nothing and had sent no money home; and out of Kanthong's estimated earnings of 3 million kip, she had remitted just 600,000 and had 300,000 kip saved with the owner of the shop. Pouy, who had been a service woman for less than a month, said she had spent everything so far, and while she might remit at some later time, she wanted to save for a gold necklace first.

Yet for most, especially for those who had been service women the longest, ties with home still ran strong. Voy had started working as a service woman two years before, but only stayed in beer shops for one or two months at a time, returning to her village in between to help with farming or her sick brother. Bounam and Souny similarly stayed home between two and five months before deciding to go out again. Kanthong was the exception, moving shop to shop without break, but after four and half months she said she missed her mother and would go home for a bit if the shop owner would let her. None has been a service woman for more than six months altogether.

Of the future, few had ambitious plans. Several speculated about returning to their villages to get married or farm, or said they didn't know what they would do; but in the

interim the cycle of movement was to continue. Toei, who had yet to sell sex,<sup>142</sup> was first going to try her luck in a garment factory in Vientiane, and after a visit home Kanthong said she would return to sex work for two or three years, recruiting friends to join her. Bounam's dream was bigger, to buy some land and build her own beer shop. She admitted she didn't know how much longer it would take to save the money, but said that when she did she would not be controlling with the women who worked for her.

## **Making sense of it all**

*The following and final chapter will examine these experiences using an interlocking analysis to illustrate how the impacts of resettlement have intersected with each other and with more mainstream influences on migration to lead young resettled women into sex work in Lao PDR. It will further discuss in greater detail the vulnerabilities they have encountered within the sector and vulnerabilities they and other resettled youth may face as a result of the legacy of resettlement on future livelihoods, before concluding with targeted recommendations to minimize lasting dependence on sex work.*

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<sup>142</sup> She had been a service woman less than a month and was resisting selling sex after having been deceived by Mrs. Mu; but without any payment of commissions she was unable to return home.

## **From Resettlement to Sex Work: Intersecting Risks, Intensified Vulnerabilities**

In more ways than one, the roads taken by young resettled and non-resettled women have converged *en route* to the nightclubs, beer bars and barbeque dog shops where they ultimately share sleeping quarters, confidences and sometimes clients. This research reveals that their decisions to migrate have each been driven by their own combination of real needs and family obligations, by growing consumerism in the midst of mounting modernization and relative poverty, by the search for cash when local options are limited, and by a quest for escape and adventures outside the village. Importantly, for both resettled and non-resettled service women, returned sex workers and “friends” have facilitated their entry into sex work, even if duties at their destinations were far from clear or outright deceit was used as a draw.

Yet this study demonstrates that unlike their non-resettled sisters in the sex sector, the journeys of young resettled Indigenous and ethnic minority women began earlier, in the uplands, where roads and many other symbols of difference didn’t reach and where deprivation was more mentally manageable. For them, decisions in the years since cannot be separated from the complex challenges, changes, expectations and unknowns that displacement and resettlement have created in their lives and in the lives of their families.

The pages that follow will illustrate just how key vulnerabilities to sex work in Lao PDR have intersected with vulnerabilities imposed by recent resettlement programs to

draw young Indigenous and ethnic minority women into sex work. It begins by analyzing common risks and illustrating how they have been introduced, catalyzed and intensified in the wake of resettlement, exploring, first, the advent of consumerism in the context of economic and social changes, and then the ascendancy of cash, mentally and in real terms, amidst limited options. Family obligations and pressures were also transformed, which together with exposure to new lifestyles, fueled a desire for escape and adventure. The unique socio-cultural risks of resettlement that contribute to migration are in turn examined, as is evidence of how resettlement has raised the risk of exploitation within the sector in the present, while also introducing its own ongoing livelihood uncertainties that threaten to transform supply for sex work in unprecedented ways in the future. The chapter concludes with a summing up and practical recommendations for cultural- and context-specific programming and research to moderate the presence of resettled women in sex work through both viable local alternatives and safe channels for migration.

## **Section One: Discussion and Analysis**

### **Consumerism in the context of exposure, economic hardships, stratification and status**

No conclusion would be complete without addressing the quest for consumer goods, which was clearly a main motivator in the migration of almost all of the core participants in this study. This is evidenced both in their statements and the spending of sex work earnings. But while few lowland Laotian villages are marked by an abundance that can accommodate the ever-emerging material cravings of the country's teenage population, there can be little doubt that the roots of consumer-driven migration by young women in

the consolidated communities that were studied are inextricably intertwined with the resettlement process. Resettlement has introduced unparalleled exposure to consumer goods, amidst often-avoidable economic hardships that have constrained disposable incomes, and disparate levels of wealth, which prompted feelings of relative poverty.

Purchases made in the uplands were largely practical and usually limited to a few suits of clothing each year or salt, oil and other necessary goods that couldn't be grown. For those that had surpluses the priority seemed to be saving for "a time when we didn't have any." Interviews show that acceptance of this pragmatism began to change quickly in the lowlands, where consumer goods were vastly more visible — in the markets and through the increased presence of traders, on television, and most influentially, in the possession of established residents.

Critically, in this context of new "needs" and "wants," economic hardships and uncertainties were at times considerable. This was due in large part to what has been called the state's "schizophrenic" implementation of resettlement and related policies.<sup>143</sup> Official aid and rehabilitation assistance varied greatly among the participants and was most present in the case of Kanthong's family, who were ostensibly relocated due to perceived security risks from Hmong rebels, as well as anecdotally in a dedicated resettlement village that was created to receive residents of Bounam's village. Yet for her family, who had opted to join relatives in a different community, and the families of other core participants, assistance from authorities was sporadic or mostly absent.<sup>144</sup> This was

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<sup>143</sup> So called by Evrard and Goudineau (2004:954).

<sup>144</sup> The decision of Bounam's family may raise questions on whether or not migration to the lowlands was spontaneous and voluntary or the result of physical displacement, as there is some evidence that spontaneous migrations have overwhelmed available resources in parts of Lao PDR (Garcia 20 June 2006). However in all instances officials told the families of participants to move, and economic displacement resulting from swidden and opium restriction was

true despite the fact that three were resettled in the same district as Kanthong.

As a result decapitalization was significant. For nearly everyone it began in the uplands with orders to cease cultivation of poppy or the destruction of opium crops as a precursor to resettlement, which removed an important source of supplementary income where few others existed.<sup>145</sup> Although soldiers could be spared for that purpose, in only one instance were resettlers officially assisted in transporting their belongings to their new homes. This forced most to sell or leave behind a portion of their assets, including rice harvests or livestock, before departing. The likelihood that the revenue from these sales were under market value is reflected in the comments of Bounam, who stated that after selling all of their rice harvest in the original village her family was able to buy back just half that amount and “some” meat in their new home.

Decapitalization then continued and indeed initially worsened in the lowlands because of a combination of: delayed or inadequate provision of paddy land; costs incurred in constructing replacement homes; failure to compensate for assets left behind or rebuilding expenses; livestock epidemics; and the need to purchase food in the interim before new paddy or swidden could be found, cleared, planted and harvested. As a result of this failure on the part of the state to follow the basic tenets of resettlement planning,

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certainly an issue, which puts the onus on the government to ensure proper preparations and assistance. For four participants in this study the resettlement site was set, but the family of one opted to forgo that selected site in favour of joining cousins in another community, while another whose family was simply told to “go find paddy” said they did exactly that and “just went out for ourselves to find paddy,” which was also not coincidentally where relatives were already established.

<sup>145</sup> This finding is both unexpected and potentially significant as Khmou especially are not usually associated with opium cultivation; thus the vulnerabilities imposed by policies to eradicate opium production may be more widely felt than past forecasts. Nonetheless many unanswered questions remain. Participants often provided some detail to accompany their answers, like Bounam, a Khmou originally from Phongsaly who said her family grew opium from the time of her parents’ parents. But what is not known is how others came to be involved in opium production, including whether or not they were cultivating fields that had been abandoned by previously relocated Lao Seung groups or were doing so under contract to those groups or other outsiders, or if opium cultivation was a response to restrictive land allocation.

most of the core participants in this study reported rice shortages for the first year or two after resettlement.

Donations<sup>146</sup> from established family members, the sale of livestock, increased collection and sale of non-timber forest products, and the use of savings offset true hunger during that transition period. Later, the provision of replacement land as one of multiple, mostly land-based livelihood strategies, helped the families of two of the core participants to produce rice surpluses. In contrast, current economic hardships related to the partial failure of rice crops in two communities (together with debt incurred as a result of high hospital fees in the wake of relocation in one of those cases) directly contributed to the decisions of Toie and Voy to migrate.<sup>147</sup> Family economic need as a motivation for migration will be discussed in more detail in the coming section on family obligations.

Nonetheless, for all prosperity in the lowlands was elusive and significant, recapitalization was complicated by a combination of: a scarcity of paid work, the apparent failure of the state to devote adequate resources to restoring or improving productive livelihoods, decreasing NTFP supplies and growing competition in sales as more and more resettlers or migrants arrived. Consequently, even as material exposures and expectations expanded in consolidated communities, disposable incomes and most non-essential purchases were limited by both the immediate and lasting economic impacts of ill-planned resettlement.

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<sup>146</sup> Of rice especially. There was no suggestion that established relatives had donated replacement land, but the fact that the three core participants who joined family were all given paddy within a month while the others waited one to two years, raises that prospect.

<sup>147</sup> Although both cited lack of rain as the reason, it is not clear if the continued imposition of three-year fallows on lowland swidden was also a factor. Toie acknowledged a fear of yields falling further still in the future.

The exception was televisions. Despite crucial unknowns, chiefly delays in the provision of replacement land sufficient to meet subsistence needs, three families purchased televisions within a month of two of being resettled. Others paid to watch. Apart from the implications of savings being spent in this way — a marked departure from the aversion to risk that Scudder and Colson claim mark reactions in the early years after resettlement (1982:272) — and more direct impacts on migration that will be discussed in greater detail below, televisions only served to add to economic insecurity and for some, reinforce the appeal of material goods.

But it was established residents who had the most influence over the changing expectations of young resettled women. In upland villages wealth levels were on the whole quite comparable and prosperity for the few more fortunate families was mainly evident in more land, livestock or larger rice surpluses. In contrast, the resettlement process in Lao PDR has depended on the concentration of uplands populations into consolidated communities that bring together displaced people from different ethnic groups over a number of years. While the present and future risks posed by resettlement to established residents — who have at times been obliged to relinquish land to new migrants — should be investigated further, it is clear from the responses that even as resettlers became poorer, some original inhabitants or earlier migrants, including Lao Seung, stood out as having “more”<sup>148</sup> — more land, nicer clothes, bigger and better houses.

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<sup>148</sup> Da Silva noted that Hmong targeted under early resettlement policies actually did quite well because at that time there was still ample land available and many were able to use remittances from relatives in the United States to buy additional plots (09 June 2006).

Because of this economic stratification, five of the six expressed that they felt poorer than established residents and four described feeling that they had lost status relative to their new neighbours. Although not stated outright, these feelings may have also been compounded by the welcome that some new resettlers received, including tensions over land access,<sup>149</sup> thefts of clothing, food and animals, and in one instance the perceived poisoning of livestock.

In these settings, access to material goods — especially big ticket and highly visible items like motorcycles, gold, refrigerators and better houses<sup>150</sup> — was seen as the way to smooth over differences, to be the “same.” The resettlement literature from Zambia has specifically singled out the “need” for young women to display visual signs of modernity (Colson 1971:168-169) and indeed the experiences and adaptive reactions of young women were the main focus of questions in this study; but their responses also provided some evidence that the expectations of older resettlers were likewise expanding. At least one parent encouraged his daughter to seek paid work so that she could have the same as other young people in the community did.

After a time of rebuilding and restricted incomes, some money was coming in from market sales of vegetables and forest products. Three of the six participants noted that in theory they had access to that money; however apart from limited clothing purchases in a few instances, the core group universally said there wasn’t enough extra to buy the things they wanted, as food or savings took precedence. Others, like the families of Souny and

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<sup>149</sup> Including from both established residents and other migrants or resettlers who were still waiting for land.

<sup>150</sup> Most core participants specifically singled out basic post-resettlement houses as a source of feelings of poverty; notably, the earnings of Thai sex workers have commonly been directed to improving or building new homes for their families (Watenabe 1998:122).

Pouy, were spending their savings — on televisions and generators or electricity, as well as critically on food — but still, their daughters said they had no money for other wants.

The impact of dependence on parents as new consumerism was curtailed by economic constraints and family obligations is unclear. However one resettled service woman said she wasn't given any money to spend; another had to steal the bus fare to Luang Namtha even though she said she was entitled to share in the earnings from the bamboo she collected; and two others indicated they wanted to go out to earn money to spend “only” on themselves.

All did this to varying degrees — spending all or part of their incomes from sex work on clothing, make-up and jewelry — although the two service women who came from the poorest backgrounds both remitted most of their earnings, and were more driven by family needs. Nonetheless of the three core participants who sent money home, one Khmou woman directed her father to buy a motorcycle for himself and another told her mother to save to buy a refrigerator, even though her home had yet to be connected to electricity. Both said they were motivated to have the “same” as other residents in the consolidated communities to which they were resettled — and while Bounam stressed that she didn't have to migrate for work because her family had enough, she says she did it because it would mean more money.

### **Ascendancy of cash and the absence of opportunity**

Cash, and the question of how to access it, came to occupy a central place in the post-resettlement thinking of most of the core participants in this study.

It would be inaccurate to portray the upland economy as a pristine example of the

subsistence and barter lifestyles, as the families of all core participants earned at least some cash income from opium, NTFPs, vegetable or livestock sales, and in two instances had paid work clearing or harvesting the fields of neighbours. Nonetheless the need for money to spend was more limited as the forests were for the most part plentiful, several families hunted and fished, at least two had fruit trees, and, with the notable exception of those who were originally from Phongsaly, rice surpluses were the norm.

Accepting resettlement<sup>151</sup> was said by the women to be more about easing hardships by being close to roads, and having access to clean water, electricity and less arduous paddy land than anything. In only one instance was the prospect of more paid work seriously mentioned as a factor in the decision to move. Two of those interviewed stressed there was no need to work for pay in their original villages because they had “enough” to eat.

But “enough” changed in consolidated communities, both in terms of real and imagined needs, and consequently so too did the importance of cash. Again a correlation with ill-planned resettlement and insufficient rehabilitation assistance is apparent.

Amidst land delays and shortages and as wildlife populations were killed off by the growing human population searching for food in and around consolidated communities, expenses associated with purchasing essential subsistence items like rice and meat rose significantly in the early years. New costs were also introduced by the need to transport goods to market in one case,<sup>152</sup> by hospital fees, and particularly by the purchase of televisions, which went hand-in-hand with charges for electricity usage or generators.

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<sup>151</sup> In at least two instances (Kanthong and Pouy), participants noted that they were forced to move, while Voy’s family, which suffered extreme hardships in the uplands, moved soon after they were told to by officials.

<sup>152</sup> Voy’s new village was 30km away from the nearest market.

Ultimately, however, it was the perceived need for cash stemming from imagined needs that was most directly linked to decisions to migrate — these “needs” again having been created by resettlement to consolidated communities.

Over the short term — a transition period that lasted up to three years — many drew on savings to cover new costs, and all intensified their collection and sale of NTFPs. Yet other new migrants were also doing the same and as competition grew, and supplies and sales shrank, cash was harder to come by. Four of the six eventually earned small amounts by growing and selling vegetables or other cash crops, and two families were able to sell rice surpluses, but these incomes were mostly limited and there was little indication of any concerted or coherent effort by officials to assist resettlers to improve their livelihoods. Again, Kanthong’s family received the most benefits, which included free rice, corn and vegetable seeds, paddy training three times a month and training in how to grow and market cash crops. Bounam and Souy were also given seeds, but training was inadequate and in the two cases where it was offered, focused solely on paddy.<sup>153</sup> According to Bounam, agriculture officials used to give training to established residents, but no longer did after her family moved in. Instead most were forced to learn paddy techniques by watching others. It is not known how this affected their yields or incomes.

In this context, access to paid work was limited for most. Only two core participants, Kanthong and Bounam, the two that had worked in the uplands, had any real access to paid work. Geographically Bounam was better positioned and in Oudomxay had some

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<sup>153</sup> In one of these cases only men were trained and in another was just twice a year, apparently as an aside to checking to see if trees had been cut.

access to work in Chinese factories and plantations — yet opportunities were impacted by gender biases, low pay and bad working conditions, limited days and heavy home responsibilities. Kathong relied heavily on off-farm employment, including work paid in rice, during the two years her family waited for replacement land, but eventually competition increased and offers dropped off. Given their past experience, confidence may have been an issue in securing these opportunities, but for the others, three of whom were from the same immediate area as Kanthong, work was in short supply. Notably the opportunities that did exist were almost exclusively agricultural, which deserves future consideration in planning alternative livelihoods, given that half of the core participants expressed growing dissatisfaction with farming.

Nonetheless cash needs continued to grow; and despite the scarcity of paid work and stated concerns about competition in NTFP sales, two of the core participants defended their perception that life was better in the lowlands because it was easier to earn money. In fact cash became so important to one that she and her family no longer participated in the reciprocal labour arrangements that had existed between neighbours in the uplands, saying that if people wanted her help, they would have to pay her.

### **Family needs, obligations and workloads**

For at least two members of the core group — Voy and Bounam, who were from the poorest backgrounds — the lure of cash that compelled migration was directly linked to real economic needs for themselves and their families, whether immediate or long-term. These needs were not exclusively the products of resettlement, but clearly the process introduced new economic vulnerabilities and attendant increases in family obligations.

Voy's decision to migrate was explicitly related to debt resulting from the repeated hospitalization of her brother post-resettlement. True, there is no obvious evidence that his medical issues were related to resettlement, but other factors that were related combined to limit any safety cushion the family might have otherwise drawn on. These factors included the destruction of poppy crops in the uplands; the sale of livestock to cover early food purchases post-resettlement; the provision of un-irrigated paddy which generated lower yields and may have contributed to a partial rice crop failure;<sup>154</sup> tensions over land that prevented her family from farming in the year after their arrival; exposure to new illnesses in the absence of health facilities that likewise kept them out of the fields; declining sales of NTFPs as competition grew; and livestock epidemics/poisoning in the new community. In this context and with few local options for paid work, Voy was adamant that she had no choice but to migrate in order to provide for her family.

For Bounam, the pressure to provide was intense and internalized, as her parents were elderly and no longer able to work outside of the home. Her story has much in common with Voy's in terms of the decapitalization that accompanied displacement and resettlement. However, it diverges in that she was able to employ multiple income-earning activities to overcome the economic shocks of resettlement, and to build a small cushion of savings to pay for her parents' medicines and draw on when times got tough. Yet the emotional toll of this responsibility has high. She and her younger sister were solely responsible for gathering NTFPs from a forest that was now 10km distant,<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Voy indicated that the crop failure in 2005 was due to low rainfall, but it is possible that the pre-existing irrigation issues may have worsened the yield further still; but as Lugo notes: "normally there's enough backup system where you don't have out-migration because of crop failure" (1 September 2006).

<sup>155</sup> The forest having been taken over by new migrants in search of swidden.

selling clothes on commission in other villages, farming, selling vegetables grown on the fringes of that plot, working off-farm when opportunities presented, and selling candy and other goods from a small shop in their house. She migrated because sex work would bring in more money, but also insisted, “I just wanted to go out and care for myself for a bit.” Nonetheless, both she and Voy remitted most of their sex work earnings.<sup>156</sup>

There was, in fact, some parental pressure on most of the participants to contribute income to the care of their families in consolidated communities. Certainly obligations also existed in original communities, but the absence of any real migration from the uplands seems to suggest that traditional land-based duties or locally available paid options were sufficient to fulfill family obligations. This isn't to say that all parents, apart from Kanthong's mother,<sup>157</sup> were directly driving the migration of their daughters in the lowlands — three of the six core participants left without even telling their families<sup>158</sup> and all took ownership of the decision to leave.<sup>159</sup>

Plainly, family obligations post-resettlement also played out in local settings in ways that contributed to migration. All but two of the core participants<sup>160</sup> noted that their workloads had increased, especially during the early years of rebuilding. Again, links with poor resettlement planning are readily apparent: for many, rebuilding entailed a labour- and time-intensive combination of constructing new homes; clearing new

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<sup>156</sup> Although the complexity of individual motivations is evidenced by that fact that Bounam's remittances were used for a combination of basic needs, big ticket consumer items and saving for the future.

<sup>157</sup> Who told her to go out and earn money, and then arranged for her daughter to go to a beer shop in exchange for an advance on her earnings.

<sup>158</sup> There was no evidence of growing family tensions as has been highlighted by the DIDR literature and select studies of sex work in Lao PDR.

<sup>159</sup> Nor did they remit all or at times any of their earnings, although one had not yet had clients and may have gone on to send remittances, especially given that her village had suffered a partial rice crop failure in 2006.

<sup>160</sup> Souny's family was living off their savings, while her cousin Pouy, together with her family, seemed to be suffering from culture shock immediately after resettlement, having stopped swidden, collecting NTFPs, school and other traditional activities.

swidden in the absence of adequate replacement land or amidst delays in the provision of paddy; intensified collection and sales of NTFPs; paid work where it was available; and other livelihood strategies to make ends meet. Perhaps not their main motivator, workloads were nonetheless considered in the migration choices of at least two of the core group,<sup>161</sup> one of whom said she wanted to escape because she had to do everything at home, had no time to rest, and just wanted to go out and “play herself.”

In contrast, while heavy workloads continued for two of the core participants, others complained of growing boredom as workloads eased and paddy replaced swidden, school was abandoned and forest collection dwindled with “nothing to do” to fill the gap. Notably, comments by Da Silva also raise the spectre that the influence of lighter workloads may be more complex and he stresses that for some ethnic groups — like the Khmou who have often been branded as “lazy” by those who do not understand their production systems — unfilled time carries a heavy stigma that most seek to avoid. Conversely, he admits, amidst work pressures, migration can likewise be an “enormously liberating experience” (da Silva 18 June 2006).

## **Escape and adventure amidst new exposures**

The desire for escape and/or adventure that resulted featured variously in the decisions of at least four of the core participants to migrate, and can be traced to expansive exposures to new lifestyles that were introduced by resettlement. Life in the uplands — before resettlement and the restrictions that preceded it — was defined by swidden farming, subsistence and relative isolation. Lowland life was undefined in that it exposed resettlers

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<sup>161</sup> These workloads, together with coming of age, could also be the reason that migration post-resettlement was typically delayed by several years for all but one of the core participants.

to a range of different livelihoods and opened gateways to modernity that could not be achieved locally.

Television was one such gateway and where four families had radios in their original communities, all of the core participants now owned or had access to TVs. The influence of television on migration among the wider population has been well-established in the sex work literature on Lao PDR, and its implication for consumerism-inspired migration by young resettled women was previously discussed in this chapter; but in showcasing the ‘modern life,’ television shows also instilled a dissatisfaction with rural life that provided further impetus for migration. Together with their new roadside locations, which exposed them to travelers, four noted that what they saw on television influenced them to want to see new places and people. For three, migration was also inspired by their growing dissatisfaction with farming, which was the lone option available to most of the core participants if they stayed in their communities. Instead they preferred to work in an office or factory, which they said the programs showed.

Yet, as with feelings of relative poverty, it was again the immediate reality in resettled communities that was especially influential on the migration of core participants. For Bounam, that was the sight of other young people with easier lives and more free time,<sup>162</sup> at a time when her own workloads and responsibilities were all encompassing.

For all it was exposure to often extensive and entrenched out-migration where

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<sup>162</sup> She was also the lone participant to have a beer shop in her community.

migration had either been non-existent or minimal in their original villages.<sup>163</sup> This was particularly true of Muang Nambak in Luang Prabang — 23 of the larger sample originated in this district — and to a lesser extent Muang Xay in Oudomxai. There was no definitive answer on how proportionately other resettled women were represented in the migration the core participants witnessed, but it is potentially noteworthy that from the one resettlement site to which Bounam was to have relocated — a site set apart from the road, with extensive benefits and composed of a single ethnicity — there was no reported migration. Conversely past migrants from consolidated communities typically came from different ethnic groups; and it was both friends, relatives and young women from established families who were influential in motivating those from the core group to leave their communities. While there is no clear evidence of recruitment for money — their reasoning needs to be addressed in future research — the power that these returned migrants possessed was considerable, factoring heavily in the decisions of five of the core participants to migrate. Indeed, three said that they wouldn't have left if their “friends” hadn't asked. How truthful those “friends” were, in combination with the apparent willingness of most of the core participants to follow with little understanding of the nature of the work that was waiting for them, is a clear cause for concern.

## **Resettlement-related Vulnerabilities**

So too are vulnerabilities that appear to be unique to the resettlement process.

Evidence of one such potential vulnerability came to light through partial interviews with three young resettled Kui women. While their answers (which were limited by the

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<sup>163</sup> The exceptions being two women from the large sample who migrated from the uplands, but only after restrictive swidden and opium policies had been imposed.

limited Lao language skills of two of the three) didn't offer conclusive proof, existing knowledge of their home community from academic sources has revealed that it was both the site of extensive hardships and a location where liberal pre-marital sexual traditions were exploited by outsiders in the wake of resettlement. This raises the possibility that this experience socialized them into commercial sex work,<sup>164</sup> although economic hardships were reportedly severe (Lugo 1 September 2006) and one was also supporting a baby on her own. None of the Khmou women in the core group said that they had sex before becoming service women.<sup>165</sup>

In another case, the migration of Pouy, it seems likely that culture shock played a part. Unlike the other core participants, she migrated not three to five years after being displaced, but within five months. In that time the depth of change experienced by her family, who had resisted resettlement, was seemingly all-encompassing: her schooling was discontinued; she began to date multiple boys; the family no longer went to the forest; and apart from farming the small plot of paddy they were given, did not work; no new swidden was opened; nor were livestock or extra land repurchased because Pouy said her family didn't have enough money. Instead, they used what would have been considerable savings from the sale of their upland rice, land and livestock—including two buffalo that were sold immediately after their opium crop was destroyed, and two more just prior to moving—to buy a television and food, and survived on rice donations from extended family. Having reportedly never left her original village prior to being resettled, it was a major leap to migrate; it is possible that this period of confusion and

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<sup>164</sup> And increasingly into formalized commercial sex, as they were no longer confined to just soliciting outside of bars.

<sup>165</sup> It is not known if they were completely honest or if social stigma played a part in their responses, as dating had increased and at least one had a regular boyfriend at some point in the past.

uncertainty further added to the influence of her cousin, who had previously been a sex worker and with whom she ultimately migrated. However a recent report on trafficking by the ADB additionally stresses that in situations of social and cultural imbalance imposed by resettlement, migration can also become “a quest for cultural coherence that is no longer available in the village” (2009:36).

## **Sex Work Vulnerabilities**

How prepared Pouy and other resettled women were to avoid exploitation as young migrants was another logical concern based on a thoughtful marriage of existing knowledge on resettlement and the changing nature of sex work in Lao PDR. One red flag was the naiveté that Chamberlain found characterized young women trafficked from Lao to Thailand, among whom resettled ethnic minorities were disproportionately represented (Lao-MOLSW/UNICEF 2004: 18, 56); and as possible contributors to naiveté in young resettled women were the discontinuation of education, limited Lao language skills or interaction with individuals outside their own ethnic groups, culture shock, and little experience with the monetary or wage labour economy. Jagdeo has moreover cautioned that young rural women may have limited understanding of where they are geographically, and that without a social network, they are at risk of being taken advantage of (14 June 2006).

Accordingly this study considered not only how resettlement-related vulnerabilities resulted in migration, but also how risks to young resettled women played out in relation to entry into the sex sector, conditions of sex work and exit options.

For instance, although the influence of education on migration by young ethnic

minority women in Lao PDR has never been definitively decided one way or the other, its potential to mitigate vulnerability deserves restating — “better access to schooling within the village would at least delay the decision to migrate and give young migrants a stronger capacity to avoid risks and exploitation” (Sayavong 2006:10). Schooling for core participants in this study was certainly compromised by displacement and in particular heavy home responsibilities post-resettlement, gender biases, and having little money for school fees among economic constraints in newly consolidated communities.<sup>166</sup> These young women were uncertain as to whether their low education levels would limit the alternatives available to them, both in terms of paid options apart from sex work and classes of venues within the sector;<sup>167</sup> yet at the same time their answers revealed a very narrow understanding of different types of employment or what they would need to do to access them, most having had no experience beyond farming. In fact only one of the core participants said that she had really understood what it was to be a service woman because there was a beer shop in the community to which her family relocated.

Rather, the naiveté noted by Chamberlain was obvious in the tendency of the core participants to blindly follow “friends” without asking for more information about the type of employment or amount of pay that awaited them. It is not clear that the returned sex workers who recruited five of the six core participants — including Souny who deceived her own cousin — were intentionally seeking to exploit this ignorance or innocence, and there is no evidence of financial compensation for them having done so.

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<sup>166</sup> Only one of the four with heavier workloads post resettlement was able to continue school, but even then Toei had to stop after two years when her older sister migrated and her older brother was unwilling to help.

<sup>167</sup> At the time of this research Luang Namtha did not boast many, if any, higher-range nightclubs; nonetheless of the resettled women surveyed, only one was found in a low-end barbeque-dog shop.

However, few were forthcoming with full or honest explanations, as was equally the case with roughly half of the non-resettled service women who were surveyed.

For the most part, beer shop owners were not directly involved in recruitment,<sup>168</sup> nonetheless one alarming exception plainly points to the vulnerability of at least some young resettled ethnic minority women to unscrupulous outside actors and would-be traffickers. This was the case of the one Luang Namtha beer shop owner who purposely recruited young resettled women because she knew there was real economic need, parental pressure to earn, increasing interest in consumer goods, and because she found “girls straight from the village” easier to control. She told them only that they would be selling beer for commission and later maintained that they were free to sell or not sell sex. However by withholding commissions from beer sales for a month — their sole form of payment apart from sex — she restricted their freedom of movement and put indirect pressure on the young women in her employ to service clients.<sup>169</sup>

For two of the five core participants who had already gone with clients, direct pressure was also in play and they were forced to have sex the first time. Nonetheless similar percentages of non-resettled service women reported having been forced into sex, and there was no indication that resettled women were more vulnerable to violence at the hands of their clients, less prone to demand that they use condoms, or obligated to service greater numbers of clients out of economic need related to resettlement — although three said that

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<sup>168</sup> This isn't to say that some didn't use psychological pressure or the pretense of friendship to encourage the service women in their employ to approach their friends. Kanthong spoke repeatedly of her close relationship with the owner of the barbeque dog shop where she worked, and also of that woman's dislike of the other service women at the shop. Kanthong insists she did not ask her to recruit friends, but she says she will do so anyway when/if she goes home.

<sup>169</sup> One participant was also cheated of commissions at a separate establishment — as were other non-resettled service women at the same beer shop — while two others noted they didn't keep track of the commissions owed to them so they too may have been at risk of being underpaid.

they always went when propositioned because they needed the money.

One area where certain resettled ethnic minorities might face greater risks than their non-resettled sisters is in the earning of lower incomes. It was typically the women themselves who negotiated their fees, often with early guidance from fellow sex workers. But three of five members of the core group reported the lowest fees of any of the women surveyed — two earned just \$5 USD/client, half the mean rate of 100,000 kip. More striking is anecdotal information on Kui service women. One beer shop owner in Vieng Phouka indicated that Kui would go with clients for as little as one-fifth of the mean rate or nothing at all. Another manager in Sing maintained that two Kui women — who were not interviewed but were suspected of being resettled and who were from a community that saw traditional sexual practices exploited by outsiders in the wake of resettlement — earned normal fees only because she negotiated and collected for them. She was forced to do so, she says, after several clients left without paying.<sup>170</sup> This could relate to language difficulties making the Kui a target for exploitation, lack of confidence, desperation or past customs around gifting sex to visitors, but clearly the low fees of some resettled service women need to be investigated further as the prospect of a low-cost, high-volume sex trade in Lao PDR increases.

In the end, the ability of at least three resettled Khmou service women to leave was constrained; for Kanthong by the opposition of the owner of the barbeque dog shop, who was willing to give her money from her savings for clothes, but not enough to return home; and in the cases of Toei and her cousin Daeng, by the owner withholding beer

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<sup>170</sup> She additionally stressed that the Kui in her employ were very naïve when it came to cleanliness, which taken together with their language difficulties, may raise questions about their ability to demand safer sex.

commissions, which had already forced Daeng to sell sex against her wishes in hopes of earning the 280,000 kip needed for both of them to get back to their village.

## **Future Vulnerabilities**

A life outside of sex work is seemingly the wish of many service women in Lao PDR.

Evidence from the wider sector suggests that sex work is often simply a short-term strategy to gain an alternate future, with earnings frequently ear-marked for beginning small businesses (Lao-MoLSW/UNICEF 2000:20) rather than a return to more traditional activities.

Access to such alternatives could be especially critical for resettled ethnic minority service women if lasting dependence on sex work is to be avoided; but in the context of coming of age, worsening constraints on the carrying capacity of consolidated communities and warning signs that signal the apparent absence of long-term planning by both the state and the women themselves, ongoing and future vulnerabilities to being drawn back into sex work are substantial. This risk applies as much to the core participants as to other young residents of resettlement sites.<sup>171</sup>

Plans for the future varied among the service women interviewed. Only one of the core group had such ambitious plans as opening her own shop; from most of the others there were only vague pronouncements about potentially returning to their villages to farm paddy, feed pigs or find someone to marry. How much longer they would remain sex workers was equally unsettled and unattached, for the most part, to saving a certain amount for a certain productive purpose.

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<sup>171</sup> Potentially including those from established families.

Instead it was the absence of savings that creates some cause for alarm. For most, lacking or limited savings from sex work were an outcome of new consumerism. In nearly six months Souny had saved nothing. Her newly arrived cousin Pouy was on a similar track and made clear that her priority was buying nice things for herself, with a 1.7 million kip gold necklace already costed out and on her list of must-haves.<sup>172</sup> Even Bounam, who was acutely aware of the need to save as her parents grew older and so remitted most of her earnings, first instructed her father to buy himself a motorcycle.

Nonetheless both she and Kanthong expressed a desire to build up their savings and suggested that they would continue as service women for another two to three years to do so. Conversely Voy insisted she didn't want to go out for sex work again and would return home after a month or two. However, with a four-time pattern of revisiting sex work for short periods<sup>173</sup> and with almost all of her remittances to date targeted to her brother's hospital debt and ongoing medical expenses, it is not clear that she and the other core participants who spoke of returning home to stay will have the luxury of choice; particularly if the safety nets that family savings represent are also compromised by consumerism, the early economic impacts of resettlement and continuing economic challenges in consolidated communities, as was especially the case with the parents of Souny and Pouy.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> At her current rates she would need to have sex with over 30 clients to save enough.

<sup>173</sup> Of the four among the core participants who had worked at more than one beer shop, all but Kanthong had returned home in between for a break. Their motivations for secondary migration are less well understood.

<sup>174</sup> With only small plots of land to feed their large families and no other sources of income, the parents of Souny and Pouy were spending down savings from the sale of buffalo and other assets. Clearly the economic and land constraints imposed by resettlement played a part in this spending, potentially in combination with the tendency of the Khmou to be minimizers, but so too did consumer purchases, particularly of televisions. Again, some Mon-Khmer groups like the Khmou have been specifically singled out for failing to plan ahead or manage spending, but as Lugo explains: "They've never had to before and they've always been near enough to the nature resources that they've never had to worry about that" (1 September 2006).

A potentially critical constraint on this choice, and on the future vulnerabilities of young resettled women to migration and sex work, is the severely curtailed access to productive land and communal natural resources in consolidated communities. Inexplicably and inexcusably, resettlement to the lowlands continued long after the carrying capacity of host areas was exceeded. This was evident in the responses of the core participants on growing populations in consolidated communities, declining access to NTFPs (as collection increased by new migrants in search of food and money, as resettlers cleared forests for swidden) and crucially, around shortages in farmland.

The only members of the core group who were given sufficient replacement paddy land for subsistence were those with only a few children at home. The remaining three, who each came from families of six or seven children, had only enough paddy to grow half the amount of rice needed to subsist. At least two others who were resettled later, but weren't interviewed in full, noted that they were given no paddy at all, but rather were forced to buy land. Comments also confirm that all available swidden in the three lowland communities to which the core participants were relocated was in use and that there was no potential to expand family holdings. Again this can be traced to ongoing resettlement and potentially to spontaneous secondary migration. For instance, one community in Luang Prabang to which four or the six were resettled saw its population grow by at least 85 households between 2000 and 2001, while Voy's new home in Muang Xay more than doubled in size since the late 1990s, when migrants<sup>175</sup> from

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<sup>175</sup> She was unable to indicate whether or not they came directly from the uplands or were secondary migrants who spontaneously relocated after initially being resettled elsewhere, as has been highlighted as sometimes occurring by researchers and development practitioners working on resettlement in Lao PDR (Garcia 20 June 2006).

Nambak and Phongsaly moved in.<sup>176</sup>

What this will mean for the core participants hoping to return home to resume their past lives or reinvent new ones with families of their own is far from clear; but especially for those with many siblings, it is impossible to see how their long-term needs can be accommodated in communities already compromised by overcrowding. Indeed, these same concerns should be applied to other young people coming of age in consolidated communities, whether they have been resettled or not.

Non-land based options in rural Lao PDR are still fledgling, and responses to interview questions revealed that it is unlikely that most will find a return to the uplands desirable, having had a taste of the modern life. What is left is all too often sex work. Toei and her cousin Daeng were already planning to try to find work in a garment factory — a stopover on the road to sex work for many young women. Bounam, by contrast, thought she had found a way to remain in her village and would save to purchase land, not for paddy, but for a beer shop of her own. Either way the cycle of migration started by resettlement seems set to continue.

It is also clear that the intersecting stories of sex work and development-induced displacement and resettlement are far from finished in the Lao People's Democratic Republic; this is true in terms of the potential lasting impacts of past resettlement on migration and the imposition of risks on new resettlers amidst evidence of enduring and evolving displacements.

Despite suggestions that bureaucrats in some districts began to ignore the policy

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<sup>176</sup> There is also some cause for concern that this population pressure will impact future food security even more than it already is if the swidden on which many resettled families rely fails. Crucially constraints on swidden, which again played out in shortened fallows, continued in the lowlands.

dictates of the central government as conditions worsened (Da Silva 7 June 2006), that administrative (in place of physical) consolidation was gaining favour (Chavez<sup>177</sup> 16 October 2006), and that *in situ* development in the uplands is garnering some official support (“Laos: Finding” 2008), both government-sponsored and industry-induced resettlement is continuing.

Little is known about the scale of current plans, but in 2010 a U.S. State Department report on human rights in Lao PDR confirmed that the displacement of upland ethnic minorities under the anti-opium and anti-swidden agendas of the state was ongoing (USDOS 2010), even though Da Silva was already insisting in 2006 that “there is absolutely no land available” in many would-be resettlement areas (7 June 2006).

At the same time there is growing evidence that land is being made available for hydroelectric, road construction and mining projects (UN-WFP 2007:25), which along with rubber and other plantations are spurring new displacements or the threat of new displacements (“Government” 2010; Baird 2009:17). Some of this land seems to be that which was vacated by past “conservation-inspired” anti-swidden displacements, as has been the case with rubber plantations in Luang Namtha (Lugo 1 September 2006).<sup>178</sup> Yet there is also evidence that mining and plantation forestry activities may be complicating conditions and land shortages in certain consolidated communities (ADB 2009:33);<sup>179</sup> and the ADB’s Participatory Poverty Assessment for 2006 charges that some officials are

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<sup>177</sup> *Not his/her real name.* Hugo Chavez is a researcher working on Lao PDR.

<sup>178</sup> Mining is also very much a mountain top activity, but little evidence has so far been put forward on links to land left behind by past resettlement.

<sup>179</sup> Official sensitivity around (and censorship of) language related to resettlement in Lao PDR often make it difficult to know whether communities referenced by researchers are resettled or not, but whether in original villages or consolidated communities, Lang and Shoemaker (2006) have found that plantations supported by ADB plans have both converted healthy forests and taken over lands deemed “degraded” that are in fact used by swidden farmers (2-3, 5).

guilty of “inappropriate collaboration with private companies at the expense of villagers” (Chamberlain 2007:3).

In the context of industrial developments like these — which often rely on the labour of male migrants — and the completion of trade corridors, risks for the expansion of the sex sector are very real; yet as Da Silva also warned in 2006, the GoL “is not prepared” (18 June).

## **Section Two: Conclusions & Recommendations**

Nor, as this thesis has demonstrated, was the Government of Lao prepared to deal with the consequences of over two decades of displacement and resettlement. As a result of this ill-planned and ill-implemented resettlement, and indeed the complexities of resettlement itself,<sup>180</sup> the vulnerability of young Indigenous and ethnic minority women to being drawn into sex work has clearly intensified.

To this end, the individual economic, social and cultural impacts intersected both with each other and with known influences on migration in incredibly complex and nuanced ways that I have only begun to touch on. Thus while consumerism was without a doubt a core consideration in the choices of almost all of the core sample to migrate, it was largely created by resettlement and the economic hardships, constraints on disposable incomes, potential dependency, new expectations and exposure, relative poverty and declining status it imposed. Likewise, the quest for cash that migration became was a product both of this consumerism and the monetization of resettled societies — societies that were transformed by the need for some to turn to paid work or for others by

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<sup>180</sup> Especially, social complexities arising from the consolidation of different ethnic groups into mixed communities.

constraints on paid opportunities, that came head-to-head with new economic challenges, rising costs, intensified work demands, and real family obligations or pressure.

Intermixed through it all were the uncertainties and imbalance of young life in the lowlands; the quest for escape or adventure that resulted from heavy workloads or growing boredom with few local options to offset it; the influence of being exposed to new lifestyles, in particular lifestyles that were based on the entrenched migration of young people rather than farm work; the culture shock — or more appropriately the economic, social and cultural shock — that may have added to the naiveté that young resettled women displayed in accepting blind migration.

On that note, this thesis has also made clear that young resettled women do face unique risks of being trafficked and exploited within the sex sector, owing in part to their backgrounds and the resettlement process itself; and while there is no evidence at present that they are confined to a high-volume, low-cost sector, the low fees of some offer some cause for future concern; especially in light of worsening conditions in consolidated communities amidst land shortages, environmental degradation and growing population pressure, and amidst evidence from this and other studies of the distinct dangers for certain ethnic groups, like the Kui.

Indeed, given the interlocking nature of present and impending pressures on young resettled women, it is important to conclude this study with recommendations for a range of integrated research and resources that should be brought to bear on this issue.

I am confident that this study has enhanced understanding of the links between sex work and development-induced displacement and resettlement, although its insights are

much more economic and social than cultural; and as an inter-cultural examination limited by a small sample, its strength is in its revelations of the realities of resettled Khmou sex workers. While some distinctions were identified in the responses of Kui and the lone Phu-Noi, they do not allow for generalizations. That was never the intent. Therefore many unanswered questions remain, as well as incomplete answers that could be filled in through ongoing research.

The Government of Lao PDR has an obligation to seek these answers; morally, with respect to the sex sector because so many clients and some establishment owners have ties to the government;<sup>181</sup> politically, because official plans have contributed to the expansion of sex work and caused the impoverishment experienced through displacement and resettlement and the coercive policies that preceded them; and legally, under gender and ethnic equality commitments and safeguards in national law and international human rights covenants, conventions, declarations and protocols.<sup>182</sup> Critically, with the state so dependent on international agencies, non-governmental organizations and bilateral donors, and amidst evidence that a number of these have either motivated or directly funded resettlement that contravenes international human rights (Baird and Shoemaker 2005; ILO Monitoring 2000:13-14), these obligations also extend to non-state actors.

Some stand out for the strong stand they have taken against resettlement in Lao PDR, including organizations like Action Contre la Faim, which has had some success in

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<sup>181</sup> Of the ten commercial sex venues surveyed, four owners were asked about their backgrounds and all were either directly or through their spouses connected in the past or present with the government, police or military.

<sup>182</sup> For examples nationally, see Chapter 2, but in summary these include The Constitution, The Law on the Development and Protection of Women and more recently the 2005 Decree on Compensation and Resettlement. Baird has raised concerns about the application of the Decree, noting that provisions have already been violated (2009:15, 17), while the German cooperation agency GTZ has acknowledged that the dissemination of the Decree has been lacking and awareness of its contents is low among officials (“Government” 2010). Key international obligations include UNDRIP, CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the UN Trafficking Protocol, all of which Lao PDR has signed.

promoting *in situ* development in the uplands for communities slated for resettlement, by investing in the construction of access roads, water systems, cropping alternatives and terracing (“Laos: Finding” 2008); while the INGO network, which brings together 60 international NGOs working in Lao PDR, recently raised concerns about new resettlement and the capacity of the government to manage rapidly-increasing foreign investment in mining, hydroelectric projects and plantations (McPherson 2010).

Yet to them, as well as to the GoL, its business partners, IFIs and other international donors who have enabled resettlement in Lao PDR, I offer these concluding recommendations for culturally appropriate research and programming to minimize the participation of young, resettled Indigenous and ethnic minority women in the sex sector or to mitigate the risks for those who choose to migrate:

1. **On Resettlement:** First and foremost “resettlement as usual” cannot be allowed to continue. Under international law and recognized best practice, no resettlement of Indigenous Peoples<sup>183</sup> can take place without their free, prior and informed consent (UN 2007:art. 10). Even considering supposedly spontaneous resettlement, this has clearly not been the case in Lao PDR. But amidst absolute evidence of land shortages in the lowlands, and long-term challenges and worsening poverty in some consolidated communities,<sup>184</sup> *any and all* future resettlement in the country — whether motivated by industry or state plans — needs to be seriously reconsidered. To this end donors must step up monitoring, exert influence, and make the aid on which the GoL so relies conditional on respect for the rights of Indigenous and ethnic minority peoples, *and* the cessation of resettlement.

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<sup>183</sup> Many other ethnic minorities in Lao PDR are also owed the right to free and informed consent (FPIC) by virtue of C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO 1989: art. 1, 2, 16), while regional courts, like the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, are likewise upholding the FPIC rights of Tribal Peoples, as was the case in *Saramaka v. Suriname 2007* (Weitzner 2009:5)

<sup>184</sup> The ADB’s Participatory Poverty Assessment for 2006 revisited a number of villages first surveyed in 2001 and found that 14 of 30 were either the same or worse off, owing to the consolidation of communities, anti-swidden and anti-opium policies, and land reform. Primary causes of poverty were attributed to limited access to land and population pressure, amidst serious depletion of natural resources (Chamberlain 2007:2-4).

2. **On Upland Development:** One alternative that has had some success is intensified development efforts in the uplands, and this should be a donor priority. This is not to say that migration of young people will be prevented, as the reach of modernization is growing and remote access roads may also bring the risk of exploitation to upland communities; therefore *in situ* development must take into account the needs of young women through education, awareness raising, training, and the development of alternatives where possible.
3. The right of return for resettled Indigenous Peoples is also raised as desirable in UNDRIP (UN 2007:art.10). It is unclear how many young people would willingly return to the uplands having had a taste of the “modern life,” yet some past resettlers have retreated amidst resource constraints in resettled communities; if this option is presented in combination with the *in situ* development advocated above, it may contribute in a small way to the easing of land shortages and population pressure in the lowlands.
4. **On Rehabilitation:** Nonetheless, even if the worst waves of resettlement under official policies seem to have passed, the rehabilitation of hundreds of thousands of those already resettled needs to be an immediate priority if the long-term dependence of displaced women and girls on sex work is to be avoided.
5. Rehabilitation plans should be based on more detailed research into and lessons from the diverse realities and responses of different resettlers, including resettled service women. Specifically, ongoing research needs to increase understanding of:
  - a. Why some ethnic minorities are more resilient amidst the challenges of resettlement than others;
  - b. What cultural or societal factors limit the presence of certain ethnic minorities in sex work;
  - c. How experiences have or have not differed in resettled communities that are made up solely of one ethnicity, as was the case in the site to which the rest of Bounam’s village was resettled and where no out-migration had reportedly occurred;
  - d. Potential areas of vulnerability within households that may make some more at risk to migrate than others — including households run by single mothers or elderly parents, those having only a few children versus many, those with many sons, etc.;
  - e. Potentially unforeseen vulnerabilities, such as poppy destruction without alternatives for non-Lao Seung groups, or if resettlement is influencing young women from host groups in consolidated communities to migrate;
  - f. How inheritance and the issue of future livelihoods for young people coming of age are being handled (or not handled) in consolidated communities;
  - g. What local livelihood alternatives are acceptable to young people;
  - h. What distant opportunities are desired by young people.

6. Clearly, rehabilitation programming has to be designed with the full and meaningful participation of beneficiaries (including young women), be targeted to high risk groups, and be culturally adaptable. At a minimum it should include:
  - a. Support to rebuild traditional livelihoods, including potentially through technical assistance with terracing to maximize space and yields in the lowlands, inclusive agricultural extension and consideration of land distribution based on need;
  - b. Support for alternative livelihoods, especially those that create choices for young people;
  - c. Assistance with savings and training in money management;
  - d. Social supports and efforts to celebrate cultural diversity, rather than stigmatize it;
  - e. Efforts to ensure the continuation of education for girls amidst competing responsibilities and gender biases.
  
7. **On Migration and Sex Work:** Nonetheless, even where local options are improved, some young women will undoubtedly continue to migrate. In order to mitigate the risks to these women, programming should address:
  - a. Awareness-raising in all communities on the realities of migration and sex work in Lao PDR;
  - b. The creation of safe channels for internal migration;
  - c. Research on the motivations of past service women for recruiting friends, including the role of compensation from establishment owners;
  - d. Research on internal trafficking generally, and in relation to resettlement, with prosecution of those found responsible;
  - e. Ongoing research into evolving risks around the sex sector;
  - f. And finally, independent monitoring of sex work venues beyond current monthly ID checks by police, or visits by officials of the Provincial Committee for the Control of AIDS, and in ways that support and protect service women.

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