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## Environmentalists Object to Laos Nam Ngum 3 Hydropower Project

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A group of environmentalists commissioned to conduct an ADB-funded impact assessment study of the Nam Ngum 3 hydropower project have submitted the results of their study, and expressed concerns about the impacts that the dam will have on water quality, fisheries and villagers' livelihoods.

The Nam Ngum 3 is one of four hydropower dam projects that the Lao government plan to build on the Ngum river with the aim to produce about 2,100 megawatts of electricity by 2013 for exports to Thailand.

Thailand has signed a memorandum of understanding to purchase some 7,000 MW of electricity from Laos starting from 2015. To meet this demand, the Lao government has commissioned foreign companies to perform feasibility studies on six dam projects along the Mekong river, namely in Luiang Prabang, Paklay, Pakbaeng, Sayabouly, Sanakham and Done Sahong.

The move led non-governmental groups such as the U.S.-based International Rivers Network to raise concerns and say it would do all it can to prevent constructions of those dams, citing enormous environmental and social impacts.

Lao officials argue that feasibility studies do not necessarily lead to dam constructions, adding that the point of the studies is to find out whether it will be worthwhile to build those dams.

Addressing a recent ministerial meeting of the six nations of the Greater Mekong Sub-region(GMS) with donor countries as well as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, Lao Deputy Prime Minister Asang Laoly asserted that the Lao PDR always strove to maintain a sustainable development, meaning its economic development must be balanced against its social development and the protection of the environments, as stipulated in its socio-economic development strategy for now until the year 2020.

The six GMS members are China, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Listen to our Laos Today report for more details in Lao.

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