



Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Lecture Series
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Revisiting the Xe Bang Fai River in Laos

Assessing the Downstream Impacts of the Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Project and
New Cross-Border Political Ecologies

Dr. Ian G. Baird

Date: Tuesday, 01 November 2016

Time: 03:30 pm

Venue: Seminar Hall, Department of HSS

The Nam Theun 2 dam (NT2) in central Laos is the largest completed hydropower dam in the Lower Mekong River Basin. It was also the largest hydropower dam in Asia to be supported by the World Bank in the 2000s. As a trans-basin diversion dam, it takes a large amount of water from the Theun River and sends it, via a large reservoir and a long channel, to the Xe Bang Fai River. As a result, the dam is causing serious downstream impacts. It is particularly important to recognize that the vast majority of the energy produced by NT2 is not consumed in Laos, but is exported to neighbouring Thailand, and especially to Bangkok where a large amount of energy is consumed. Energy consumption for air conditioning is particularly important, and as a result the operation of NT2, and water releases into the Xe Bang Fai River, are highly dependent on air conditioning demand in Thailand's capital city, which is not even located in the Mekong River Basin. When air conditioning demand is high, more energy is produced and more water is released into the Xe Bang Fai River, thus creating new cross-border political ecologies. Essentially, the ecology of Xe Bang Fai River, and associated downstream environmental and social impacts are being heavily influenced by electricity demand in far-away Bangkok. In this presentation, I explain how new cross-border political ecologies related to NT2 have emerged.

About the Speaker

Dr. Ian G. Baird is an Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is also affiliated with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison. Originally from Canada, most of his research takes place in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, where he lived and worked for over 20 years before moving to the United States in 2010. His research is varied and includes studying the political ecologies of dams and large-scale land concessions in mainland Southeast Asia, borderland studies, and research related to ethnicity and indigeneity issues in Asia.