

# **Behind the white lights**

**The story about impacts of small  
and medium hydropower plants in  
Sa Pa, Lao Cai province**

## 7 SMALL AND MEDIUM HYDROPOWER PLANTS AFFECTING BAN HO COMMUNE

STT	Hydropower plants	Locations	Investors	Investment banks	Capacities (MW)	Construction times	Information sources
1	Bản Hồ	Bản Hồ	CTCP Công nghiệp Việt Long	BIDV	10	? - 2020	
2	Nậm Sài	Nậm Sài	CTCP Công nghiệp Việt Long		19	2016 - 2020	
3	Nậm Toóng	Bản Hồ	Công ty TNHH thủy điện Sapa	VietinBank	34	2007 - 2017	<a href="https://thanhtra.com.vn/kinh-te/Dau-tu-vao-Tay-Bac-Doanh-nghiep-moi-quan-tam-ma-chua-man-ma-86924.html">https://thanhtra.com.vn/kinh-te/Dau-tu-vao-Tay-Bac-Doanh-nghiep-moi-quan-tam-ma-chua-man-ma-86924.html</a>
4	Sử Pán 1	Sử Pán	CTCP Công nghiệp Việt Long	VietinBank	30	2015 - 2018	<a href="http://investor.vietinbank.vn/NewsDetail.aspx?News-ID=78676#">http://investor.vietinbank.vn/NewsDetail.aspx?News-ID=78676#</a>
5	Sử Pán 2	Bản Hồ	Công ty Sông Đà - Hoàng Liên		34,5	2007 - 2011	
6	Séo Chung Hồ	Tả Van	Công ty TNHH ĐTĐL Việt - Trung	VDB	22	2004 - 2012	<a href="https://moc.gov.vn/tin-tuc/1184/28656/lao-cai-thuy-dien-seo-chong-ho-sa-pa-ngan-dong-dung-tien-do.aspx">https://moc.gov.vn/tin-tuc/1184/28656/lao-cai-thuy-dien-seo-chong-ho-sa-pa-ngan-dong-dung-tien-do.aspx</a>
7	Nậm Cùn	Thanh Phú	Công ty CP ĐT & XD 299	VietinBank	6,5	2016 - 2018	<a href="https://www.vietinbank.vn/web/home/vn/news/15/12/vietinbank-thuc-day-phat-trien-kinh-te-xa-hoi-vung-dan-toc-mien-nui.html&amp;p=1">https://www.vietinbank.vn/web/home/vn/news/15/12/vietinbank-thuc-day-phat-trien-kinh-te-xa-hoi-vung-dan-toc-mien-nui.html&amp;p=1</a>





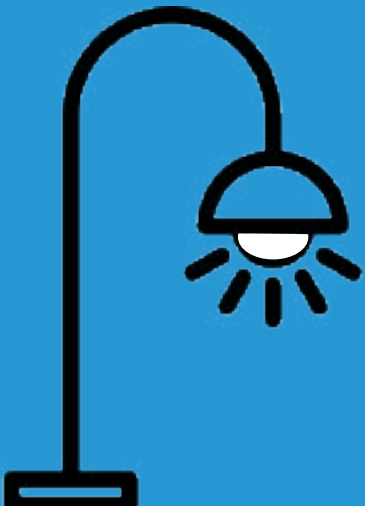
*Den village, July 2020*

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# Behind the white lights

As the city grows, the economy blooms increasingly. Houses are lit with electric lights, and neighborhoods sparkle in blue, red, purple, and yellow; there are laughters and dramatic growth reports. Behind these façades are people living in desolate, dull places, with devastated landscapes. One word keeps on repeating: if only, if there were not so many sacrifices for development... Will their lives be as they were promised before?

Having lost their land, lost their livelihoods, young people go on leaving, off to distant cities and industrial zones, longing to merge with those beautiful and shimmering lights. Silent shadows of people remain, their lives passing each day



**Behind**

**the white lights**



The Su Pan I Hydropower plant was built in 2016 and put into operation in December 2018. Like many other projects, Sủ Pán I was built on the so-called great urgent need of Vietnam's electricity, to meet demands for economic growth, and as a premise for economic development.

Seemingly good purposes...



Su Pan I Hydropower



Bridge connecting Ban Den village with La Ve village and Ma Quai Ho

*“It was 3 in the morning. I opened the door and saw water everywhere. So much fear. We ran upstairs. Without warning, we didn’t know what to do.”*

The suspension bridge connecting Ban Den village with La Ve village and Ma Quai Ho collapsed due to the flood discharge of Su Pan hydropower plant just six months after it came into operation. It took three months for people to have a new bridge to travel on. During that time, all connection between the villages was interrupted. They thought of building a bamboo bridge.

It was dark and the water swallowed everything...

## Life must go on ...

During the three months of waiting for the new bridge, people built a temporary bamboo bridge over Mường Hoa stream. Each pass costed 2,000 Vietnamese dong. People still had to risk passing because they had to live, needed to go to the fields, to work as hired labor, and to buy necessities. Under the stream bed are sharp rocks.

*“The school is on the other side of the bridge. Fortunately it was summer break, so children were not in school.”*

Fortunately!



Muong Hoa stream





Nam Toong Hydropower

Below the Su Pan I Hydropower plant are the Su Pan II and Nam Toong Hydropower plants. These two hydropower plants lay parallel on opposite banks of the Muong Hoa stream. Below them are houses in the villages of Ban Den and La Ve.



Su Pan II Hydropower

Development and  
more development ...

Ban Den is naturally granted with four hot water sources, but three out of four water sources have been lost due to the hydropower plant, which was built over them.

*“I am very fed up. Rebuilding has meant losing a lot. After rebuilding the tanks at the upper (hot water source) for just under three months, it was affected by the pipeline of the Su Pan II hydropower plant. Then we had to rebuild again on the other side of the stream where Nam Toong Hydropower kept discharging waste and dumping land. By October 2012, they (the hot water sources) were entirely filled up.”*



Nam Toong Hydropower

The remaining hot water source was embanked into a tank by a household, but last year it was completely submerged by a flood, severely discharged from Su Pan I hydropower dam. People have to invest money to rebuild.

*“It costs hundreds of millions. How can you work with the cost of tens of millions (Vietnamese dong)?”*

*“Everything was swept away, nothing left.”*

**Everything went with the flood water...**



Hot spring





La Ve stream

Water of La Ve waterfall also runs all the way into hydropower (it is led through a water transmission pipe of six kilometers to reach Nam Toong power station). Previously, there were plenty of fishes of diverse species in La Ve stream - big fishes, many of them up to ten kilograms.



The water of Muong Hoa stream is becoming more polluted and cloudy due to the waste pouring downstream. In Muong Hoa, people have long stopped using this water.



People use crevice water from the mountains for domestic use. However, water shortage still occurs.



Muong Hoa stream is dry

*“Cơm lam” (traditional-cook rice in bamboo stems), “cá nhảy” (fish jumping over the water surface) are also no longer available. Now, visitors all go to Ta Van, because that place still retains the wild look.*



"Đàn Nhị" - the Tay's musical instrument

*"Here were no guests, hence, no performances organized. Whenever we have fun, we can dance and sing. If there are guests, we rehearse and perform."*

The natural landscape was severely damaged; this place no longer attracts tourists. Natural resources are exhausted, young people also gradually left to work away from home; people have been consumed by their daily life and not many care about performance anymore. They only perform when there are festivals, but young people rarely return. Clothes and musical instruments like these are just for storage. The traditional long dress and trousers, scarves, and dancing - when there are no chances to perform, culture gradually fades away.

Muong Hoa stream used to have a lot of fishes and shrimps, but now hydropower plants are built, one after another. Not many fishes and shrimps remain. There are no fishes in winter and few in summer.

*“Before, a lot ...”*



Fishing net

There are things that only exist in the past...





Hydropower is under construction

Now, La Ve stream has two more hydroelectric power plants under construction, namely, Ban Ho and Nam Sai. Bulldozers still work hard to shovel soil, and water flows. The most heard things on this trip are the words “before” or “in the past”, and “should be.” There are problems that could be foreseen, but everyone has to sacrifice for development. Nowadays, Ban Den and La Ve no longer have tourists, so no one will remember it, remember how beautiful it once was, remember the nights of singing and dancing, the pride.

*“The price for losing their dreams and their livelihoods is unquantifiable because nothing can ever pay off the loss of cultural heritage. It’s so easy to let go of someone’s losses when they’re invisible to us.”*



Hydropower is under construction



*“Cheap energy, the price behind them will never be seen.”*

*-Visarut-*

Used up today ...

... What is left for future?

When financing **decisions are made** ....

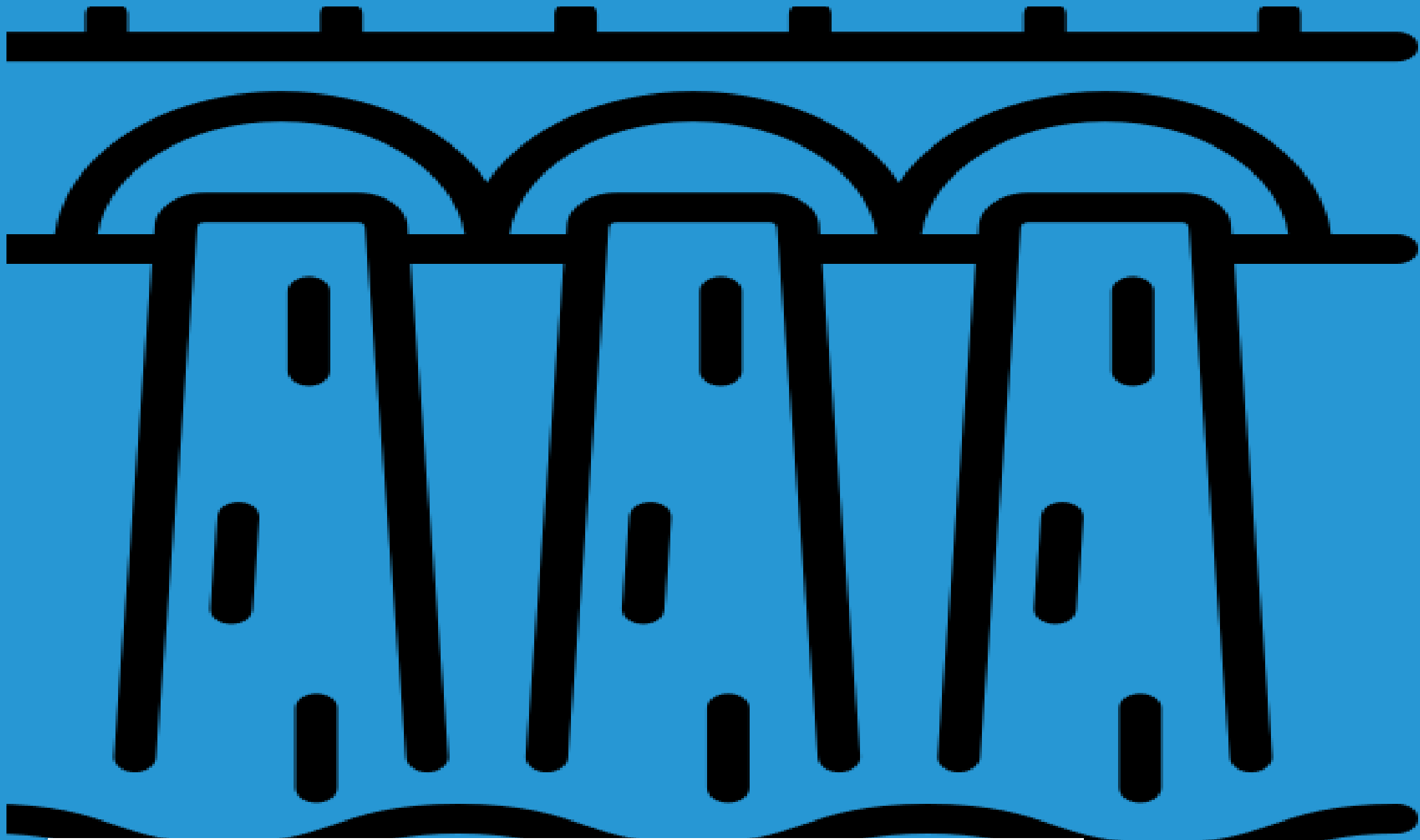
... Have **financial institutions** considered

... **People's voice** in a meaningful and inclusive way?

... **Environmental, Social, and Cultural** aspects comprehensively?

*Is Green credit is green in reality?*

*Do green credit and investment policies bring justice to the people and equality for their children when the heritage is gone ?*



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