

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As the largest infra-structure initiative in the Lao PDR, the Nam Theun 2 Hydro-power Project will undoubtedly affect the health status of those living in the project intervention areas, as well as inhabitants of adjacent geographic areas. Although the NT2 Project will act as the catalyst for most health-related impacts, other concurrent and future development projects may synergistically interact to set the stage for a radically different health picture than the one that currently exists. These cumulative impacts on health will affect the rural communities and small towns of Nakai, Nhommalat, and Mahaxay Districts of Khammouane Province, and to a lesser extent, communities in Xebangfai, Nongbok, and Hinboun Districts in Khammouane, as well as Kamkeut (Bolikhamsay) and Xaybouly (Savannakhet).

Being able to reasonably predict potential cumulative impacts affecting health, over a 5-20 year time span, is not an easy task. Twenty years ago, for example, few scientists would have predicted the successful outcome of the human genome mapping exercise, or many of the recent advances in molecular biology, that have dramatically expanded our present awareness and understanding of how to approach health and treat disease. Similarly twenty years ago very few health professionals would have foreseen that HIV/AIDS would explode into a raging pandemic that presently affects more than 40 million people around the globe. The situation in the Nam Theun 2 Project intervention area is considerably less dramatic or complex, but in order to make predictions about cumulative health impacts one needs to review a number of inter-related factors. This includes the overall health situation presently found in various locales of the proposed Nam Theun 2 Project intervention area. It also encompasses potential developments that can arise during the 5-year reservoir-power station construction and village resettlement phase, as well as other concurrent and/or future external macro and micro-economic developments that are reasonably expected to take place locally, nationally, and regionally.