

# WATER SOURCE MANAGEMENT BY COMMUNITY

by Thai ethnic people in Hanh Son commune  
Nghia Lo, Yen Bai, Vietnam

Author: Lo Thi Nhien  
Head of women union - Hanh Son commune

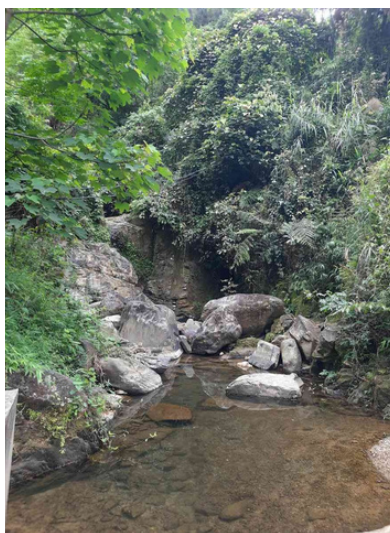


## Thai community

The Thai ethnic group is a minority in Vietnam, primarily residing in the mountainous regions of the Northwest. Our culture is showcased through stilt house architecture, intricate handcrafted products, and oral storytelling traditions. We have our own language and writing system. Currently, the Thai community in Hanh Son commune lives along the Nam Thia stream, nestled in the Muong Lo Valley in Nghia Lo town, Yen Bai province. Here, we - the Thai people mainly engage in wet rice farming, relying heavily on nature.



*Nhà sàn đặc trưng của người Thái*



Watershed

## Water source

In Hanh Sơn commune, 70% of households use water from running troughs and streams. In the past, the local practice of slash-and-burn agriculture and cutting down forests led to a lack of water for daily use and farming. At one point, about 50 hectares of rice fields in the commune had no water for cultivation, and five villages with more than 600 households lacked water for daily activities. The people had to carry and fetch water from other villages with incredible difficulty.

## Forest and water resource protection group

Faced with the challenges of water scarcity and understand the importance of preserving water sources, the people and the authority have agreed to incorporate forest and water source protection into village conventions, commune regulations, and codes of conduct. A set of rules has been established, including no deforestation, no herbicide spraying near water sources, and no destruction of water sources. Penalties have been implemented for violations, e.g a fine of 300,000 VND for cutting down a fresh tree and 50,000 VND for cutting down a bamboo shoot.

Subsequently, self-managing groups have been formed to safeguard forests and water sources, consisting of respected individuals in the village, with the village chief as the leader. These groups always include women.

These groups are responsible for raising awareness, mobilizing efforts, locating water sources, and educating people on collecting and transporting water from streams and pools to their homes for daily use.



*Self-managing group for forests and water sources protection on their patrol*

## Domestic water supply solution

Previously, households individually found streams and springs for water and used bamboo pipes to channel water, which were not durable and often damaged. Since the establishment of self-managing groups for forest and water source protection, these groups have organized propaganda, mobilization, and guidance for the people. About 10 to 20 households currently share a water spring and purchase plastic water pipes, bury the pipes, and channel water to each household. They store water in constructed tanks or water tanks for daily use. Monthly, the households take turns inspecting and cleaning their water sources.



*Households together contributed to building a new shared water pipeline*



In all activities, women from Hanh Son always actively participate. They are the main resource, and fearlessly face hardships and difficulties, regardless of gender roles. They strive to benefit the entire community and family.



# Domestic water supply protection

*Households periodically check and protect water sources and water pipes*



## Production water supply solution

To ensure a water supply for more than 50 hectares of rice fields, a collaborative model between the state and local residents has been implemented to build concrete-lined irrigation canals. The Commune People's Committee provides cement, while the local residents contribute sand, gravel, and labor for the project. Self-managing groups for forest and water source protection work with commune officials to visit each village and hamlet, rallying the commune members to contribute funds for purchasing materials and providing labor for the construction of the irrigation canals. Initially, the mobilization efforts faced challenges, but after the people were informed about the benefits of building the canals, they supported the initiative. Currently, over 60% of the fields in our commune have concrete-lined irrigation canals.



*Propaganda meeting to mobilize people to build canals*



*People put in their labor and contributed money to buy sand and gravel to build canals*



Ever since we built the irrigation canals to supply water for farming, our community has had a reliable water source for growing rice, producing grains for meals, and supporting livestock. Our economic situation has greatly improved due to our efforts to conserve and protect water sources. Through ongoing education and mobilization efforts, we've heightened awareness and action among residents about the importance of water resources for daily life.

## About the Author



*"We -Thai women teach our children about the value of forests and water through folk songs: "If you live in the forest, forest nurture you; if you die the forest burry you" and "Those who frequent go to rivers and streams know many types of fish; those who often work at the fields know many rice varieties; those who often go to the forest know many kinds of animals." We also sing, "Vegetables, bamboo shoots, and firewood are available in the forest." Women are the ones who decide which trees should not be cut down, which should be planted, and which sources of water are safe to use. Thai women actively participate in almost all family and social activities."*

Lo Thi Nhien currently serves as the chairwoman of the Women's Union of Hanh Son Commune in Nghia Lo Town, Yen Bai Province. A dynamic and energetic leader, Nhien spearheads all women's activities within the commune. In 2022, she, along with 10 other women from the commune, participated in the Women storytelling project with the Open Development Initiative. Nhien and her peers created and shared unique stories about the culture, ethnicity, and identity of the Black Thai people in the Muong Lo region, all through the perspectives of local insiders.