aspecten van maatschappelijke opbouw

aspects of the community development programme in thailand

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Introduction

In vast contrast with its capital Bangkok, one of the most thriving cities in South-East Asia, the countryside of Thailand is lagging behind in social and economic development. Agriculture, including forestry and fishing, provides employment for about 85 percent of the population; rice growing is the main economic activity. With an average population of 132 persons per square mile, on the basis of the last census of 1960, Thailand is not overpopulated, compared with other Asian countries. The availability of land has resulted in the absence of extreme rural poverty. Moreover, about 80 percent of the farmers cultivate their own lands.

The facts, however, that most of the fertile land is now occupied, and that the current annual rate of population increase is estimated at 3.1 percent, have recently caused a feeling of concern in some responsible government circles. Circumstances are especially difficult in the Northeastern region because of relatively poor soil conditions and a short water supply. Communications between this region and the Central Plain are insufficient and the area tends to be isolated from the rest of the country. The people of the Northeast, moreover, differ ethnically and linguistically from the Thai of the Central Plain. A similar problem exists in the South, where approximately 80 percent of the population of the four southernmost provinces is Malay. According to recent reports the situation is aggravated as subversive activities have been undertaken in both border areas.

In order to improve these conditions the Government of Thailand decided to concentrate its community development activities in these two regions.

The need for community development in Thailand is mainly based on two considerations: firstly, the people constitute the most valuable element of the country and for that very reason should be developed as deliberately as its natural resources; secondly, their continued poverty and isolation are conflicting with the socio-political stability of the nation.

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In this respect it is interesting to compare the objectives of community development in Thailand with those in India. Here, the agriculture problem is so pressing, that the community development programme was originally conceived as a device for urging the people to "grow more food". Thailand, being a rice-exporting country, is in its objectives not primarily concerned with an increased food production, but is more interested in building up the infrastructure of the above-mentioned rural areas. At the same time one is trying to arrive at the integration of several minority groups into the Thai nation.

From the very outset it should be clear that the undertaking of community development projects means more than the construction of feeder roads, artesian wells and local health clinics, however useful they may be. One of the most important goals of community development is to involve villagers in the planning and implementation of local development projects. Without fundamental changes in the attitudes of the villagers towards their living conditions, little or no lasting progress will be achieved. Now this perhaps is a sweeping statement, but it is admittedly precisely this change of outlook and mentality which lies at the heart of community development. The extent of change is, to a certain degree, dependent on the willingness of the community to cooperate in village projects. New habits and attitudes must be learned, new relationships between government officials and the villagers should be established. If the villagers are disinclined to accept the proposed changes, economic and social development may be considerably retarded. By giving the villagers an opportunity to participate actively in village projects it is hoped to raise their standard of living and to develop their sense of civic consciousness. In order to arrive at those goals, a special organization has been created which tries to give sufficient support to the projects through its village workers and personnel of technical departments and, at the same time, to stimulate the formation of local government institutions.

**Organization and Administration**

After experimenting with a number of community development pilot projects and recognizing that the implementation of these scattered projects without adequate support of governmental services would not result in lasting results, the Government decided in 1960 to launch a national community development programme which should be focussed on Thailand's border areas. The main issue was then how a new agency for community development could be fitted into the existing administrative structure. It was felt that the Ministry of the Interior did have an effective administrative organization with its offices at the provincial and district levels. The recognition that, in general, an agency for community development should not be placed in a technical ministry, favoured the decision to establish a new Department for Community Development within the Ministry of the Interior, in 1961. The Department is operating through the following divisions: (1) Department Secretariat; (2) Operations Division; (3) Community Education (Public Relations) Division; (4) Training Division; and (5) Research and Evaluation Division. With the creation of this central agency sufficient administrative machinery has been es-
ges in an "Amphur" (district). By the
ing and implementation of the com-
community development activities and to
ensure the much needed continuity of
the programme.

A co-ordinated approach of develop-
ment activities at the province and district
level has been made possible by the
appointment of community develop-
ment officers to the Governors and
District Officers. Furthermore, a special
coodinating system has been created
by organizing co-ordination committees
at the national, provincial and district
level. Similar systems are being utilized
in other countries in South and South-
East Asia. This device is an important
one, as it is crucial that the services of
the technical departments are provided
in an integrated way to the rural devel-

dment projects.

It should be mentioned, however, that
the establishment of co-ordination com-
mittees does not necessarily result in
effective measures of providing techni-
cal assistance. The Asian Seminar on
Planning and Administration of National
Community Development Programmes
noted that "Experience indicates the
need to exercise caution in creating these
coodinating committees, so as to avoid
proliferation at each level." 1 Moreover, it
is observed that a strong administrative
organization at the national and inter-
mediate levels does not guarantee the
flourishing of community development ac-
tivities at the village level. CHADWICK
has put it aptly, "Community development
programming is not an end in itself; it
is merely a starting point of a process
through which Government help can be
made available to the people to enable
them to raise their living standards. It
is the people and their welfare that
matter most, and that should be kept
constantly in view by all planners for
community development" 2).

Much will also depend upon existing
lines of communications and informal
relationships. Besides the need for co-
ordination, as is being stressed in most
publications on community development,
appropriate attention should be paid to
informal ways of co-operation between
the several departments and services.
Especially in a country like Thailand,
this might be possible, as in general
there exist good relationships between
the officials concerned. Moderation and
self-restraint are considered to be among
the most important social values in
Thailand. These and other basic values
should not be underestimated in organ-
zizing community development program-
mes.

A suitable way of obtaining an understand-
ing of community development prin-
ciples and methods is to arrange orienta-
tion-courses for the several categories
of civil servants. Much distrust and mis-
derstanding has been overcome by
conducting courses, seminars and study
tours for Heads of Departments, Pro-
vincial Governors, District Officers and
Technical Officers.

Concerning the implementation of the
programme, twenty four community
development project areas have been
established in the beginning of 1964,
eighteen in the Northeast and six in the

1) Report of the Asian Seminar on Planning
and Administration of National Community
Development Programmes, United Nations,
1962, ST/TAO/SER.C/54, p. 10.

2) Report of the SEATO conference on com-
munity development, 1950, CDC/60/Rep.,
p. 111.
South. Each project area covers all villages in an “Amphur” (district). By the establishment of these administrative units it is hoped to secure a base for effective co-ordination of government services related to the community development projects. An interesting feature of this type of organization is that the project area is actually coinciding with the already existing district area. The advantage of this system is that projects can be served by the existing provincial and district offices. It may be recalled that other countries in Asia have adopted the method of organizing entirely new administrative units for community development.

With regard to the organization and implementation of the programme the Thai officials concerned are assisted by advisers, provided at request by the U.S. Operations Mission in Bangkok. USOM is supporting the community development programme by also providing fellowships and commodities, such as vehicles and audio-visual material. The United Nations provided initially some technical assistance by organizing study tours for Thai officials and regional conferences on community development.

**Village workers**

Community development principles stress the need for including the people in planning and implementation of local projects. In many instances, community development is called “a people’s programme”, indicating the difference with economic development programmes which are planned and executed from above, i.e. the central government. Actually, however, all national community development programmes in Asia are being initiated by governments and not by the local communities. The explanation of this is that the people’s capacities and resources are supposed to be insufficient to enable them to improve their own local conditions. Outside assistance in the form of technical services and financial help thereby become essential features of such programmes.

This is the reason why in most community development programmes in Asia village workers are being used as government’s agents to prepare the villagers for co-operation in local projects. In Thailand approximately 300 “patanakorns” (village workers) were employed in the project areas in the beginning of 1964. Each worker is assigned to cover a group of six to ten villages.

Phrases like “village workers should organize communities for self-help action” are frequently used in publications, although they are self-contradictory. The critical point of community development is the measure of contact with the villagers, and here success or failure depends largely on the attitudes and performances of the village workers.

Much has been said about the training and requisites of these workers, and it does not seem necessary to list here all the items of training. Village workers received their training at the Thailand Unesco Fundamental Education Centre at Ubol Rajthani until 1963. From then onwards the Community Development Department conducted its own pre-service training programme. Main emphasis during the new training scheme is on practical work in community development projects under close supervision of the training staff. At the training centres opportunity is given to discuss the observations and the experience of the trainees. Having a minimum of theoretical subjects, the training programme is directed towards the pre-
Paratation of the trainees for actual field work at the village level.
Concerning the performance of the village worker much depends on the support of his supervisor, who is posted at the district town. It is obvious, that an experienced supervisor can be of a great help to the worker by giving him sound advice as to the solution of many problems of the day-to-day practice. Here again is much scope for suitable training courses for supervisors.

How do the village workers perform?
Contrary to the accepted community development approach, only very few are living in the villages. Most of them are living at the district town and travel back and forth to the villages. This can result in certain difficulties for the worker, who is identifying himself more with the officials at the district office than with the village people he is supposed to work for. As long as he is occasionally coming to the villages and is speaking mainly with the village head-men he will experience many problems in becoming accepted by the villagers. The only solution is that workers should be required to live and stay in the villages, with the understanding that they are provided with free housing and other facilities.

One of the main reasons for the difficulties encountered in the community development programme was that at one time almost 75 percent of the personnel were university graduates with an urban background. One gets the impression that many village workers look upon their job as a steppingstone to a higher general administrative assignment in a city, and preferably Bangkok.
In order to improve the quality of the workers a great deal more attention should be given to their selection. Most Thai authorities are convinced that a sense of dedication and a sincere desire to serve the community development movement are among the most significant aptitudes which have to be considered in the selecting of community development personnel. Through interviewing it may also be determined whether the applicant for a community development job understands the role and the responsibilities of the worker. There must be evidence that the applicant has the mental and physical fitness to work in the villages. More persons could be recruited with rural background; at the same time the level of secondary education should be as high as possible. Another important factor is the ability to speak the local language so as to effectively communicate with the villagers. This is of special importance in Southern Thailand where the people speak Malay. Wherever possible the workers should therefore be recruited from the area where they will be assigned to work.

Technical support
Implementation of village projects in Thailand depends, as anywhere else, on the availability of technical support and equipment furnished by the substantive ministries and departments. Many Thai officials consider the under-staffing of the technical personnel at the district level as a matter of concern. In fact, such staff is non-existent in a number of remote district offices, which is even the case with agricultural extension personnel. Another problem is that many officials at the provincial and district offices are desk-bound by their many administrative duties and responsibilities. Dependable transportation facili-
ties, proper equipment and sufficient per diem funds are also lacking which are a requirement for carrying out an effective extension programme in the villages. This being the case, some refresher courses are given to village workers in order to obtain elementary knowledge and simple skills in selected fields, especially in agriculture. They can then give practical advice to the farmers in such cases where appropriate technical personnel is not available. In principle, however, village workers should closely co-operate with technicians. If this is done and if they are provided with proper equipment, more villages can be reached and more results in village projects can be achieved. Two regional community development technical assistance centres have been constructed under SEATO arrangements, one in Ubol Rajthani (Northeast Thailand), another has recently been completed in Yala (South Thailand). The Ubol centre is designed to provide technical services in an integrated way to five provinces, thereby becoming a focal point for regional decentralization in the fields of operations, training and research. It also provides housing accommodations and administrative support for such technical services as the ministries may establish in this region. Arrangements have been made to appoint technical personnel and to provide equipment to the centres.

While there exists a strong administrative organization at the national level (Bangkok), it seems that this is totally lacking at the regional level (Northeast and South Thailand). Such administrative framework is now expected in order to make the two regional community development technical assistance centres more effective. These regional administrative bodies are planned to consist of competent civil servants, properly oriented in the principles and concepts of community development. Moreover, they are supposed to devote themselves to the various functions of administration, finance and supervision on a full time basis. If this is done these new regional centres could prove to be very adequate in decentralizing the community development programme.

An emergency programme
A special programme has been started by the Government in the beginning of 1963 in order to expedite rural development work in the two regions. This programme is carried out by four “mobile development units”. Each unit is commanded by a high officer of the Armed Forces, and is composed of 30-40 team members, mostly from various technical ministries and departments. The units are operating in isolated border areas, where certain subversive activities have been noticed. The units are equipped with bulldozers and other heavy equipment designed for undertaking rapid development measures in selected villages. Activities of the units include the construction of airstrips, feeder roads, bridges, earthen dams, artesian wells, health clinics and radio communications. When the project is completed, the units move on to another area and the Community Development Department is called upon to bring in village workers for follow-up activities. The role of the workers, at that late hour, is a very difficult one, as they can only help the villagers maintain the facilities which have been given to them. Although under this kind of “impact” programme many useful facilities are provided to the villagers, it is obvious that this approach has many doubtful
points from the viewpoint of community development. No provisions are made for letting the people participate in the activities, nor are they consulted on the projects; they are not even stimulated to make their voluntary contributions. One might ask whether the regular community development programme should be associated with this new kind of development work, unless fundamental changes in the approach are made.

Local government
Although the relationship between community development and local government in Thailand is a vital one, only little can be said about it in this article. Essentially, community development aims at enabling villagers to participate in efforts to improve their level of living. In principle, village projects have to be carefully planned by the village headman and his council, with the assistance of the village worker. During interviews with several authorities concerned, however, it appeared that in many cases the District Officer makes the decision in what manner the grants-in-aid should be spent, when they are received from the province. A special problem is hereby arising, as Thai villagers are accustomed to follow the instructions of government authorities on joint development activities. It seems therefore necessary to encourage local leaders to take an actual part in the planning, financing, and implementation of local development projects as a first step towards developing a sense of responsibility and initiative.

If local leadership is actively being promoted, the growth of local institutions could also get a new impetus. At present, the local administrative law designates the village headman and two assistants as a “village council”, responsible for the upkeeping of law and order in the village. Village headman are elected, with the consent of the district officer, but have no specific term of office. Thus constituted, this local institution seems not to be adequate for the purpose of implementing development projects. In some villages, however, a special community development committee is chosen by the villagers, and consists of five to nine members, including the village headman. Mostly, the village school headmaster is chosen to membership of the committee. Although the Buddhist priests of the local wat (temple) are not to be chosen to the committee, they are informally consulted on all matters of village life. They are, in fact, the most respected persons in the village. With the active guidance and support of the village worker such committees may prove to be the beginning of more adequate local institutions for learning how to carry out the several functions of local self-government.

At this point, it may be questioned if there is a need for village workers in those villages where local leadership is already strongly developed. Possibly the assignment of paid workers in such villages would be a disadvantage, since they would tend to discourage the initiative of the existing leaders. In those cases suitable training programmes for local leaders could be introduced in order to prepare them for their new tasks.

In this respect, interesting experiments are being undertaken by the Academy for Rural Development in Comilla, East-Pakistan. The Academy not only gives orientation courses to the officers of the
several technical departments, but also receives village leaders from the surrounding area for training purposes. The training is supported by research and experimentation under actual village conditions, which is directed to practical ends. Interesting results have been obtained as to the strengthening of local councils, the organization of village co-operatives, basic education, youth work and women's work. It is hoped that similar institutions will get organized in Thailand. The new university of Chiengmai (North Thailand), for instance, could play an important role in that respect. If properly staffed, the regional community development centres at Ubol Rajthani and Yala could also be fully utilized for such purposes.

Research
Last but not least the Community Development Department is undertaking operational research, not only in the field of community development operations, but in all other aspects of the programme as well. One would like to determine basic facts, such as the existing of living of the villagers in the many isolated communities in the border areas. What are the conditions under which participation of those villagers can be obtained? What is the relationship between community development and local government? As far as evaluation concerns, much can be done in that field as well. The executives and administrators need to know what is being achieved in the community development project areas. How do the village workers perform? What are their problems and how can these be solved?

What is the impression of the programme on the people; how much progress is being made in raising their living standards? Which leadership patterns are emerging among individuals or groups that are contributing to the success of the programme?

It should be mentioned here that the staff of the Department's Research Division is co-operating with social scientists of the Universities of Chulalongkorn and Thammasart in undertaking several studies of this kind. The University of Agriculture, Kasetsart, is engaged in undertaking research projects on technical fields, such as improved methods of agriculture, home economics, animal husbandry, etc.

With regard to experience in the several aspects of community development much can be learned from the publications of other institutions in Asia. The Community Development Research Council at the University of the Philippines, for example, has already published some useful material. In order to stimulate an exchange of information between the several agencies for community development the secretariat of the United Nations' Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East in Bangkok is offering clearing house services. Although the present activities are focussed on training in community development it is hoped that, in due course, the various reports on research projects, evaluations and other studies of the existing community development programmes in Asia can be made available to all those who are interested.