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UNITED STATES AID MISSION TO LAOS  
Vientiane, Laos

MEMORANDUM

April 1, 1965

TO : Mu Ban Samaki Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee

FROM : Peter M. Cody, Deputy Director

SUBJ : Criteria for Review of Village Cluster Program

The cluster program has been in operation for over a year. Ten clusters are now in operation and selected activities are being undertaken in other locations. The total population involved has been approximately 75,000 people or roughly three percent of the population. The program has been adjudged by most, if not all, observers to have been a success to date. It now appears, therefore, to be an appropriate time to ascertain what further actions, modifications, or extensions can be undertaken in order to further capitalize on the progress thus far. It would be useful to have both a more precise review of accomplishments to date and from this review derive more specific guidelines to improve the present program and plan further activities and expansion.

The general objectives of the program thus far have been:

- 1) Develop a series of village centers of RLG-US activity where it is deemed important to consolidate or extend RLG services and influences.
- 2) Provide and develop a series of RLG services and facilities designed to ameliorate village life, though without necessarily immediately raising cash income or increasing the participation of the population in the money economy (schools, dispensaries, home gardens to increase home consumption, wells, etc.).
- 3) To a limited extent provide a series of services and basic commodities, particularly in the agricultural, livestock and irrigation fields designed to increase participation in the market economy and raise cash income. For isolated areas the development of intra-cluster roads plus all-weather road connections to the main highways are essential elements.
- 4) Provide an organization and a concentrated receptive audience to conduct information programs designed to increase the identification of villagers with the RLG.
- 5) Provide a training ground for agricultural and veterinary extension agents, fundamental education workers, and primary school inspectors. The cluster area programs constitute a basis for increasing the competence of the workers assigned to these areas and training centers for workers to be assigned to other areas.
- 6) Through involvement of the Chao Khuengs, Chao Loungs, Tassengs, and Naibans increase the participation of local officials in village affairs and in the process strengthen local government.



7) Provide opportunities for effective civic action programs and closer identification between military and police forces and the civilian population.

In evaluating the success in meeting these general objectives and the possibility for expansion or need to reduce the emphasis on some of these aspects, evaluation should be made of the various components of the cluster programs to see if they have worked and whether sufficient and appropriate resources have been provided. In evaluating USAID personnel and material resources assigned to the cluster, consideration should be given both to those made available on a full-time basis through the Office of Rural Development, plus services and equipment provided by the Office of Technical Services and the Bureau of Public Roads Division. The same questions need to be asked of the Lao counterpart services -- Are sufficient people and resources being made available or are they being stretched too thin in light of their non-cluster responsibilities?

The following types of illustrative questions need to be asked for the various individual projects undertaken in the cluster programs.

1. Schools. What proportion of the potential school population is in school and what proportion would attend if more schools were available? What is the proper mix of Groupe Scolaires and three grade schools? Could more be done in vocational training? What is the supply of teachers? Is their training adequate to meet cluster goals and village anticipations? Are there special problems in regard to the teachers for schools in tribal areas? Is the remuneration of teachers adequate to call forth at least minimum quantity and quality requirements? Are the new textbooks being properly distributed and do the teachers receive adequate training to use them effectively? Are our designs for school buildings adequate to meet village needs and expectations or are they too elaborate? Are they appropriate to the supply of local material? Do we have the proper combination of hired skills and self-help labor? Are we asking too much of the villagers in terms of other demands upon their time? Are we involving the national and local Ministry of Education officials to the necessary degree? Do the USAID technicians spend sufficient time in the cluster projects or is too much reliance placed on the CDAs, cluster managers and IVS personnel?

2. Dispensaries. Is our present health program treating real health problems or are its benefits largely psychological? Are the dispensaries properly designed and constructed in line with the services being provided or planned? Are there additional specific health problems that could be fruitfully attacked in a more intensive manner? Given our limited resources, do we have the proper combination of preventative and curative activities? Do we have adequate supply, remuneration and supervision of village health workers? Are the services provided adequately geared to the availability of more complex health and hospital services located in provincial capitals? Are there sufficient USAID and RLC health personnel to adequately provide logistic support and technical guidance? Are we fully utilizing the potential of Operation Brotherhood?

3. Cluster roads. Has adequate analyses been made of road requirement priorities in terms of the actual and potential movement of people and commerce? Are standards of width, construction, surface, etc., in accordance



with minimum needs and TP and BPR personnel and equipment capabilities in light of their non-cluster construction, repair and maintenance priorities? Are we making commitments in excess of our ability to produce?

4. Agriculture - crops. Have we clearly defined our objectives in each cluster in terms of the possibilities for expanded production for home or intra-cluster consumption and production for cash sale? To the extent the latter is involved, has adequate attention been given to the requirements for transport, marketing and pricing? Do our programs require outlays within the immediate or ultimate capacity of the villagers to finance such as seed, fertilizer, insecticides, pesticides, tools, etc., or is it dependent upon continued subsidization? Are there real or imagined risks to the farmer in introducing new crops and practices for which compensation or guarantees will have to be provided, at least in the initial phases to overcome farmer resistances? Is there adequate consultation and agreement with farmers who occupy key positions in the village social structure to insure their support? Do expanded production goals coincide with the availability of labor and the villager's concept of how his time should be allocated between agricultural pursuits, other tasks, and leisure?

5. Agriculture - livestock. Again, is increased production designed for home consumption or sale, and if the latter, are there marketing facilities? Are we providing animals that can be properly cared for by the villagers, or will the feeding and other requirements seem excessive in labor and cost? Have we gained sufficient experience to provide only animals that are not subject to a high incidence of disease? Have we organized a systematic vaccination program with an adequate information program to secure village cooperation? Have we struck the proper balance between providing new varieties to gradually replace existing stock or breeding animals to improve existing stock.

6. Water wells, dams, irrigation systems. Have we defined our objectives in terms of access to water, reservoirs of water and more potable water or a combination in terms of villagers' desires for both humans and animals? Are there potentialities for irrigation and prevention of flooding of significant amounts of land? Have the procedures for choosing well sites resulted in a sufficiently high number of successful wells? Do we have the appropriate mix of dug and drilled wells and adequate equipment and trained operators? Are appropriate steps being taken to secure, install and maintain the pumps? Are local capabilities for maintenance being developed?

7. Sanitation. Is there an interest in improved sanitation facilities, such as water-seal privies? What type of education program is necessary to obtain village support for this program? Are there other programs of general sanitation that are or can be effectively undertaken with village cooperation?

8. Information. Attention is called to the paper "Identification and Implementation of the Psychological Goals of the Cluster Program" prepared by USIS which outlines in the broadest sense information tasks of the US personnel to the cluster programs and the roles of the local officials and villagers. These information activities relate to all of the specific cluster projects and the manner in which HD and IVS personnel establish their position and working relationships in the cluster. The extent to which these principles are being



(or should be) followed and the adequacy and usage of the various media facilities should be evaluated.

9. Small Industry. Are there realistic possibilities for developing or expanding cluster or village industry, such as pottery, weaving, salt making, agricultural processing, etc.? Are there marketing problems which we can help resolve? Maximum use should be made of the small industry survey team recently arrived in Laos.

Not only do each of these project activities require evaluation as separate activities, but also the total package for each cluster needs review to ascertain whether there is the proper combination of these projects in relation to the needs of each situation. The concept to date for the "full scale" cluster has in each case involved practically all of the project components. As the concept is expanded to "forward areas" it may be desirable to concentrate only on a limited number of elements most appropriate to each situation. Also, as the present "nature" clusters are evaluated, the decision must be made as to whether or not we will continue to emphasize all aspects of the program or just highlight certain of the more successful elements. Once the initial impact projects are built (roads, schools, dispensaries, etc.) in the original clusters, the decision has to be made as to whether to continue to emphasize primarily the maintenance and development of these existing projects and as appropriate their utilization as training centers or alternatively expand the program to contiguous areas where additional schools, roads, etc., can be built. Already pressure has built up in a number of areas to expand the cluster program to nearby villages. It is sometimes difficult to provide satisfactory reasons to villagers and local officials why this is not being done. On occasions some resentment has developed among villagers who feel "why not us?"

#### Relationships between RLG Ministries and Services and USAID Technical Assistance

Further consideration needs to be given as to whether and to what degree RLG technical services are aware of and fully participate in cluster activities. Are they devoting sufficient attention to the cluster program, or conversely do the clusters drain off too much of the time of the RLG technical services at the expense of non-cluster areas? Is there adequate coordination between RLG ministry and provincial officials and between USAID RDD and technical division technicians?

In addition to the considerations and evaluation of objectives, specific project activities, information techniques and practices, and inter-agency relationships, review should be undertaken of the USC and RLG administrative and management procedures by which -

(1) cluster plans and individual projects are planned, approved and as necessary amended;



- (2) funds are made available;
- (3) commodities are purchased and delivered to the site; and
- (4) the services of Lao and USAID technicians from the technical ministries are made available to assist in cluster programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the members of the Lu Ban Namaki Coordinating Committee review the above and be prepared to offer comments and recommend changes in the proposed items for review. Once an agreed-upon evaluation procedure is achieved, assignments can be made for conducting the evaluation.