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THE NORTHEAST RAINFED AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN THAILAND: A WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT REASSESSNMENT

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1. Basic Project Data

The NERAD Project (1981-1988) obligated $6.3 M (L), $5.7 M (G) funds from AID , matched by $5.7 M from the Royal Thai Government. The idea for the project had originated from early discussions (1978) between key officials of Thailand Ministry of Agriculture, who wanted funds for pilot agricultural research and more effective agricultural extension in the rainfed Northeast region, and the Thailand Mission whose country strategies at the time reflected the AID general basic needs policy "to reduce absolute poverty and accelerate rural development in backward areas" (CDSS FY83, February 1981, p.39).

2. Project Purposes and Goals

The major objective of the project was "to address the needs of the rural poor in Northeast Thailand by establishing in 8 subdistricts a replicable, area-based agricultural technology development program for increasing productivity and farm incomes in rainfed agricultural zones". By 1988, it was hoped that the Ministry of Agriculture would have adopted an effective, low-cost, systematic process for analyzing and resolving the key technical constraints to agricultural production in rainfed areas and be prepared to extend the system beyond the 8 subdistricts. The major components of the project included: (1) elaboration and assessment of improved farming practices, such as subsistence or cash crop technologies, water utilization, animal husbandry; (2) improvements of basic land and water resources; (3) a

more effective extension system, closely linked to research, and (4) the establishment of interactive means of matching Thailand government technology development, programs and resources with farmers' needs and problems (Project Paper 1981: Part I, B).

During its first five years of implementation, the project goals shifted from more narrowly economic concerns to more broadly qualitative ones. Similarly the project purposes shifted from a regional agricultural development program to a problem-solving farming systems approach.

(3) Theme

The main theme was improvement of the overall performance of the already diversified agricultural sector as well as further crop diversification fc bc achieved through: (a) the selection of eight subdistricts well representing its diversity; (b) the assessment of available technological options based on improved flows of information and interaction between extension workers, agricultural technicians and farmers; (c) the development of village-level specialist farmers, especially trained in the whole range of existing farming systems activities, for testing and dissemination of the relevant information; and (5) continued attention to the problems of wider replication of the project elsewhere in Thailand.

4. Implementing Institutions

The NERAD project focused from the very beginning directly at the household level, in this case "poor Northeastern farm families" (Logical Frameworks 1981 and 1983), by proposing to select specialist farmers for trials and testing and then disseminate their more

successful innovations to other farm families. But it also aimed at improving intermediary institutions, in this case the Thai agricultural extension system, and at coordinating the work of eight separate departments from the Ministry of Agriculture, each with its separate budget and decision-making process, in order to achieve potentials for continuity and replication.

(5) Project targetting

The lengthy NERAD Project Paper did not specifically target women as project participants or beneficiaries. It did list them in one passing paragraph as passive beneficiaries;"expected to benefit at least as much as men in most project activities and [possibly]... relatively more than men in a few of them such as silk production and animal husbandry" (Project Paper 1981:45).

The gender analysis in the project design was a one-page statement. The social soundness analysis acknowledged the flexibility in the division of labor of agricultural activities in NE Thai households and the fact that women often control the land and usually manage the household budget (Appendix VII: 16). Other background studies, including a socioeconomic survey of households in 66 villages in the NE region, did not include gender, or for that matter farm household labor, as a variable.

During the five years of implementation there has been no further gender analysis or recognition by the project. Only silk production, already recognised in the Project Paper as a female activity, has been targetted to women. Silk production is however at a very early stage of development. The relevant findings and recommendations of an April 1982 "baseline survey of women's roles and household resource

allocation" conducted by Ingrid Palmer in 12 villages of the NERAD project, (with funds from the Program Policy Coordination Bureau through The Population Council), were never incorporated in the project nor translated into Thai.

6. Project Implementation

During the implementation phase however, the project did impact on women, both positively and negatively.

(1) Women actively participated in the different and complex facets of the project by providing at least half of the labor and by selectively receiving some project inputs such as training in silk production. But the project has also increased the amount of labor required from women -because: (1) the new crop alternations are generally more labor intensive and crop diversification implies that labor is more evenly scattered all along the year, and (2) the generally rising occurrence of seasonal and yearly migration of rural men for cash to other rural areas, to urban areas and to the Middle East. Rural women have thus had to take over that portion of the farming activities usually performed by their fathers, husbands, brothers, or sons. This has led to labor constraints within the farm household. Increased female labor utilization also had implications for the overall quality of life of rural NE household members since women have become less available for housework and child care.

Finally women have been excluded from benefits in a number of domains, each of which directly affects the success of the project: (1) They are not consulted in the research phase about those farming activities which are more specifically theirs and which are

often crucial for attempts at increasing rural productivity (poultry raising, vegetable growing and marketing, cash crop processing, planting, harvesting);

(2) Female-headed or female-managed households, often a significant number of the middle-income households at the village level, are systematically not selected as specialist farmers for crop trials or other farming activities (with the exception of silk production), thus not having direct access, as households, to the related inputs. This contributes to socioeconomic distortions of village level selections.

(3) Rural women in general are consistently excluded from training in the new technology of machine ploughing, new seed selection, crop growing, fertilizers and pesticides applications, weeders, harvesters and processing machines, poultry, fishing and livestock caring, etc., in other words those very activities which they perform regularly on the farm.

7. Project outcomes

By March 1985 the project had expended only $0.8 M (L) and $1.4 M (G) of the AID funds, mostly in the component of the project which finances that technical assistance provided by the University of Kentucky rather than in the loan component which includes construction, cropping and farming systems activities. It is, however, too early to assess achievement of project goals and purposes. Furthermore, the implementation of project components especially at the farming level are considerably behind schedule, and this is the area where gender issues are likely to be most important. Nevertheless,

observation from this field study and supporting evidence from other studies indicate that because of lack of attention and adaptation to gender issues, there is a potential for development of project inefficiencies that may also negatively affect the quality of life of poor Northeast farm families.

The development of appropriate agricultural technologies may be jeopardized because the project is getting information only from male farmers and is not paying attention to the fact that women carry out at least half of the farming tasks, own the land and manage the household budget. Women farmers have a different perspective that is not incorporated into the process of technology development. Training for silk production, the only activity targeted to women in the project, is encountering problems because the location and duration of the training does not respond to the needs and constraints of female students.

Technology adoption, may become problematic because of two reasons:

1. women may have no incentives to adopt the new technologies, or
2. male specialist farmers who get the training and necessary farming inputs may be absent from the farm when crops need special care. The women may be busy with other crops or domestic tasks or do not have the technical information to take care of the new crops.

Technology diffusion may not occur because of the project strategy in selecting specialist farmers. Smaller and poorer farm households (many which are female-headed) will not have the resources (such as cash, land or labor) to take advantage of more efficient agricultural technology.

The project strategies to develop appropriate agriculture for rainfed farms are very labor intensive. These increased labor requirements are mostly being absorbed by Thai women farmers. Therefore, increased labor demands on women's already overburdened schedules could have a negative effect in the nutrition and well-being of their households

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Title The Northeast Rainfed Agricultural Development Project in Thailand: A Gender Perspective

Abstract (100 words) double space

This paper provides insights on the relation between gender and farming systems in the context of Southeast Asia. This is a case study of a Farming System Project in northeast Thailand that examines how lack of attention to gender issues is conducive to inefficiences in attaining project objectives. Major project components include cropping systems research and trials, village water resource development, village land use management, poultry and sericulture. The analysis highlights gender linked incentives, gender related labor constraints and gender access to resources as key factors for participation in and adoption of project inputs.

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