

ISN# 357497
(H166)

PN. ABP 465

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SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHEAST THAILAND:
OFFICIAL-VILLAGER CONTACTS AND VILLAGER LOYALTIES

GENERAL SUMMARY

A.I.D.
Reference Center
Room 1858 MS

Security and development in Northeast Thailand: problems.

TH 352 USOM/Thailand.
U58 Security and development in Northeast Thailand:
problems, progress and the roles of the amphoe,
tambol and muban government. July 1968.

54 p.
Bibliography: p. 54.
Draft.

See many only

- 1. Internal security - TH. 2. Local government - TH.
- 3. Villages - TH. I. Title

Research Division/USOM
Bangkok/Thailand
September, 1968

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHEAST THAILAND:
OFFICIAL-VILLAGER CONTACTS AND VILLAGER LOYALTIES

GENERAL SUMMARY

This is a general summary of a more extensive paper of the same title. The findings are based upon the observations of nine field researchers who lived for periods of a month to five weeks in each of 18 villages in Chang-wats Ubol, Roi-Et and Udorn during February, March and April 1968. Although the writer has stayed close to the original material provided by the field researchers, the paper undoubtedly also reflects his own up-country experience--living in and working out of the villages during about five of the ten weeks the teams were in the field, talking to villagers and interviewing amphoe officials.

These findings are one result of a cooperative study of the extent and quality of government at the local level in Northeast Thailand jointly undertaken by Chulalongkorn University, the Department of Local Administration, the National Research Council and the Research Division of USOM/Thailand,

I. Villager-Official Contacts

The paper argues that change and development in a predominately village area such as Northeast Thailand depend very much upon an outside input of ideas and resources. The Thai villager tends to be cautious and ritualistic in trying to cope with powerful forces he does not fully understand and cannot control. Yet, he also displays a marked pragmatic-opportunistic streak and a ready willingness to try new things. But his opportunities are limited by his meagre knowledge, technical skill and resources. Outside inputs are, therefore, required for significant change and development. The

Royal Thai Government has major resources, manpower and programs for making these inputs. What it does or fails to do will be a major factor in the outcome.

Such inputs are inevitably made through people. Government officials are the instrumentality through which the RTG makes its inputs. Thus, the extent to which officials contact villagers to introduce new knowledge, skills and resources will, we assume, have direct bearing on the magnitude of change and development that take place.

The paper argues further that quantity of change is one thing, quality another. The latter is as important, if not more so, than the former. Human beings are motivated by socially and culturally inculcated felt needs and most people go about satisfying these in ways deemed appropriate in their social systems. The change-agent cannot afford to impose his ideas of what is needed without regard to the felt needs which motivate his clients. He cannot afford to try to change things by means which violate the codes of his clients. Above all, he cannot afford to use techniques of coercion which demean the people he is trying to help. To do these things is to invite hostility and resistance. He must, instead, try to understand his clients' motivations and goals, establish two-way communication with him and, above all, explain and persuade. In these ways, he invites friendliness and cooperation.

The following points summarize the main findings as regards the extent and character of official-villager contacts:

1. Thai officials continue, generally, to have infrequent contacts with villages in the Northeast. Half of the villages studied had not been visited or visited only once by an official during the month-long periods the researchers were living in the villages.
2. Nai Amphoes and the police accounted for over half of the observed instances in which officials came into the villages. The study was conducted in six amphoes and two of the six Nai Amphoes were out in the villages frequently. A Nai Amphoe who was a graduate of the Nai Amphoe Academy was by far the most active. Some officials whose work directly relates to development for example Agriculture and Livestock, Officers -- were rarely or never encountered in the villages.
3. The amount of official-villager contact varies greatly from village to village. About one-third of the observed contacts between officials and villagers occurring in the villages were concentrated in a single village favored by a Nai Amphoe while, as noted above, half of the villages had not been visited or visited only once. Villagers wonder why a few receive so much attention and most so little.
4. Even when officials get out into the villages, they apparently contact few villagers. A tabulation of all villager contacts with officials during an entire year as reported by over 600 village heads of households produced 152 or substantially, less than one contact per year per villager. (More precisely, the average was 0.24 per year per villager. And, at this rate, a typical villager would have contact with an official in his village about once every four or five years.)

5. Officials visit high input villages (those in which government projects have been initiated) about three times as often as they do low input villages. The average number of observed official man-visits in nine below average input villages was 2.0 during a period of approximately one month. The average in seven above average input villages was 6.1 for the same period.
6. The essays of the researchers contained far more negative comment on the character of official contacts with villagers than they did positive (124 negative and only 23 positive). Of the 124 negative comments, slightly less than half (44.3%) dealt with various forms of official neglect (e.g., failure to take an interest in villagers, failure to establish good communications with villagers); nearly one-third (31.5%) dealt with various forms of financial exploitation of villagers (e.g., taking "tea money" for favors); the remainder (24.1%) represented various forms of abusive behavior which would be extremely damaging to relationships between villagers and officials (e.g., manifesting favoritism, harrassment of villagers).
7. The police are clearly regarded as the worst offenders in terms of negative behavior toward villagers according to field researchers reports. They ranked as high as any official on negligent behavior and highest of all officials on abusive behavior. CD workers, surprisingly, also came in for a high degree of criticism by the field researchers. However, they were seen as negligent and as exploiting villagers (mainly by diverting funds) rather than as abusing them. Nai Amphoes, MDU and Veterinary Officers were least criticised by the researchers; Palad Amphoe, Excise, Health and ID Officials also received relatively few negative comments.

8. Nai Amphoe and CD workers received over half of the 23 favorable comments which the researchers made about official-villager contacts.

II. Villager Identification and Loyalty

The paper also examine the varying degrees to which villagers of the Northeast identify with and are loyal to nation, country, state, government and region. The principal findings are as follows.

1. Prathet Thai (the concept of Thailand as a country and an independent state) is a meaningful entity with which villager identify and to which they express a high degree of loyalty. Most villagers of the Northeast, according to the researchers, think of themselves as Thai citizens and are loyal to Thailand.
2. Northeast villagers do not manifest a high degree of identification with Chaat Thai (the Thai people or nation-group). Many do not think of themselves as Khon Thai (Thai people) but as Khon Lao (Lao people). The Northeast Region (Paak Isaan), with its somewhat different language, customs and traditions, is both a matter of identification with pride and with some defensiveness.
3. The researchers view the Northeast villager as strongly identified with and supportive of the Thai system of government or simply "the government". They most strongly reject the communist system as an alternative.
4. Northeast villagers make a sharp distinction between "the government" and Thai officials. Whereas their views of the former are quite positive, their views of the latter are often negative. Thai officials are obeyed by the villagers, but many are feared and mistrusted.