PD-AAY-040 # 493-0332
5 of 6

FIRST PHASE MID-TERM EVALUATION OF KHON KAEN UNIVERSITY RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

(Focusing on the Rural Development Research Project)

Principal Evaluator

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National Institute of Development Administration

Bangkok, Thailand

March 15, 1985

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Introduction

A. Background of the Project

Khon Kaen University Research Development Project (AID Project No. 493-0332) has a long term objective to strengthen its institutional capacity to conduct research appropriate to Northeast rural communities. To achieve this objective, the Project focuses on strengthening (a) the Research and Development Institute's (RDI) capacity to administer, facilitate and coordinate research and (b) the university faculties' ability to increase relevant rural community research. The whole project is estimated to require $3.4 million of which USAID provides a $2 million grant.

Three categories of activities are being funded by the Project.

1) Strengthening of the administrative capacity of the Research Development Institute (RDI) ($500,000). This institute was established in 1980 to serve as a center for development in the Northeast. Its primary purposes are to coordinate, facilitate, administer and extend research activities, train field workers/field supervisors and serve as a link between rural organizations. In order for RDI to fulfill its functions, it has to recruit and train additional staff and to develop a financial and administrative system that provides for efficient management of projects funded from a variety of sources.

2) Rural Development Research (RDR) ($700,000) which had both commissioned and open invitation rural development research projects developed by individuals, departments, or faculties, or even outside research entities.

3) Integrated Farming System Research (FSR) ($500,000) which involves research in crops, livestock and social sciences, using methodology and techniques developed under a previous program financed by Ford Foundation.

The Project was implemented in May 1983, and is planned to last 6 years. Two evaluations of the operations of the Project are planned for during the life of the project period. The first is scheduled to take place in early 1985 and to be conducted by a team of USAID/DTEC/KKU representatives and one Thai outside consultant. The second evaluation would be conducted shortly before the Project Assistance Completion Date by a team of US and Thai consultants. This evaluation will measure the extent of institutional development of KKU in administering/conducting research and the relevancy of research in addressing/resolving constraints to the development of the Northeast. This Report is the first of these two evaluations.

This midterm evaluation has the following objectives :

1) to assess the adequacy of operating procedures developed for the review of research proposals.

2) to appraise the effectiveness of the selection and contracting procedures.

3) to evaluate the effectiveness of the administration of the Grant funds, and

4) to consider the relevancy of research being proposed and conducted.

The findings will be used for making appropriate adjustments in the project implementation.

B. Evaluation Methods

The evaluation team consisted of :

1. Dr. Twatchai Yongkittikul, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs, National Institute of Development Administration	Consultant
2. Dr. Richard L. Hopkins Human Resources Development Officer Program Office, USAID	USAID representative
3. Khun Thonekorn Hiranraks Project Officer Agricultural Office, USAID	USAID representative

4. Khun Chaiwat Wisesvitayawet,

Program Officer 7

Technical Service Division, DTEC DTEC representative

5. Associate Professor Rangsri Kanthasarn KKU representative

The evaluation was conducted in February, 1985. The primary methods were the following :

1) studies by the consultant of all documents of RDI and USAID concerning the Project. These documents include the Project Paper, KKU/ Fulbright Consultants' End-of-Tour reports, all rules and regulations, reports of meeting and seminars, research proposals, comments on proposals, official documents concerning personnel administrative matters, work manuals, accounting systems, communications, and relevant statistics.

2) informal interviews by the consultant of KKU and faculty administrators, RDR committee members, RDI staff, selected research grantees, selected faculty members whose proposals failed to obtain research grants, and other selected faculty members of KKU who did not submit research proposals for RDR consideration.

The preliminary findings and proposed recommendations were discussed with the evaluation team members, with the participation of RDI Director and selected staff of RDI. Some of the comments were incorporated in this report. The consultant is responsible for the views and recommendations presented here, however.

Part I : The Rural Development Research Project

A. Procedures for the Review of Research Proposals

In August, 1983 the RDI Director submitted the screening procedures for approval by USAID. The approved procedures are as follows :

Screening Procedures

Time period		Phases of Evaluation and Evaluators	Contacts with researchers
one week	1	Pre-screening with regards to completeness of contents (RDI)	Return incomplete proposals to researchers for improvement and correction
one week	2	Screening with regards to "limiting" criteria (RDR)	
two weeks	3	Evaluation of the quality of proposals (Outside Specialists)	
one week	4	Final screening based on "conditional" criteria	Inviting researchers to clarify certain points
	5	Formally inform successful researchers of awards	Inform unsuccessful researchers of results, explain reasons for decisions, give suggestions for future development

The proposed screening procedures were to require a total of five weeks. Requests for proposals were officially sent out on September 14, 1983, followed by RDI Director's visit to various faculties to explain the rationale for setting up RDI and the type of research to be supported by RDI. The response was quite encouraging, as a total of seventy-two proposals were submitted to RDI about a month later. These proposals were first screened by RDI staff to check figures, format and completeness of contents. Incomplete proposals were returned to researchers for correction.

The second screening by RDR Committee, based on "limiting criteria", began on October 28, 1983, in which the seventy-two proposals were divided among the committee members for independent grading. Any proposal receiving a grade of B or above was passed on to the next stage. Those papers receiving grades below B were regraded independently, and the results, including the first-round grading, were discussed at committee meetings to obtain a consensus concerning the status of each proposal. At this stage, only thirty-two proposals were accepted by RDR committee for further evaluation by outside specialists.

The final screening by outside specialists, mostly in Bangkok, began on November 14, 1983. Specialists were asked to comment and evaluate the proposals on specified items including the substance of the proposal, the work plan, the proposed plan for distribution of research results, budget, appropriateness and competency of researchers. Comments and

recommendations made by specialists were then discussed at RDR committee meetings to finalize the results. Out of the thirty-two proposals sent to outside specialists, ten were finally approved, and researchers were informed of the awards on April 2, 1984. At this point, researchers were asked to adjust and make corrections of their budgetary items and format to comply with USAID/DTEC regulations. On June 1, 1984, funds were formally requested from USAID for the ten approved projects, and disbursement began on July 14, 1984.

The entire process described above may be summarized as follows :

Date	Activities	Responsible actors	Remarks
1. [illegible]	Invitation for research proposals	RDI	
2. Oct.17, '83	Final proposals received by RDI	Researchers	72 proposals submitted.
3. Oct.16-27, '83	Pre-screening	RDI	Check for figures, format, completeness of contents. Proposals resubmitted to RDI after correction.
4. Oct.28, '83	Screening on basis of 'limiting' criteria	RDR	Proposals graded independently by RDR committee.
5. Nov.7-8, '83	RDR committee meetings	RDR	Grades were discussed. 32 proposals were accepted for further evaluation by outside specialists.
6. Nov.14, '83-Jan.20, '84	Evaluation of quality of proposals	Outside specialists	Problem: time allocated was beyond control of RDI.
7. Jan.23, '84	Final screening and approval of projects	RDR	16 proposals were approved.

Date	Activities	Responsible actors	Remarks
April 2, '84	Researchers informed of approved projects	RDI	Delay due to budgetary negotiations between RDI and researchers
9. April 10-12, '84	Researchers invited to clarify certain points	RDR	
10. April 20, '84	Revised proposals returned to RDI. Funds requested from USAID	RDI	
11. June 1, '84	Funds approved by USAID	USAID	Delay due to RDI/USAID/DTEC differences in accounting/financial procedures.
12. July 14, '84	Disbursement began	DTEC/USAID	Delay to be solved by DTEC/USAID

From the summary of activities presented above, it is apparent that the procedure took a much longer time than was originally planned. There were several reasons for this delay, many of which are in fact understandable and can be solved without much difficulty. Firstly, the number of proposals submitted to RDI, although very encouraging, was simply beyond the ability of any institute to process within the time period planned. Secondly, the handling of such a large number of research proposals was the first experience not only of RDI staff but also RDR committee. Thus, new criteria had to be set up, different accounting procedures adopted by the institutes involved had to be reconciled, regulations and reporting systems had to be studied and understood, etc. If the number of proposals submitted in the future is reduced to a 'normal' level, and the staff and committee members have acquired more experience, the procedure should be completed within reasonable and much shorter periods of time.

Recommendations. To streamline the screening procedure, the following recommendations are made :

1. The pre-screening should be carried out continually, i.e., as soon as the proposals are received by RDI, the staff can proceed immediately to check the figures, format, and completeness of contents. Although a larger number of proposals may in fact be submitted on the last day to meet

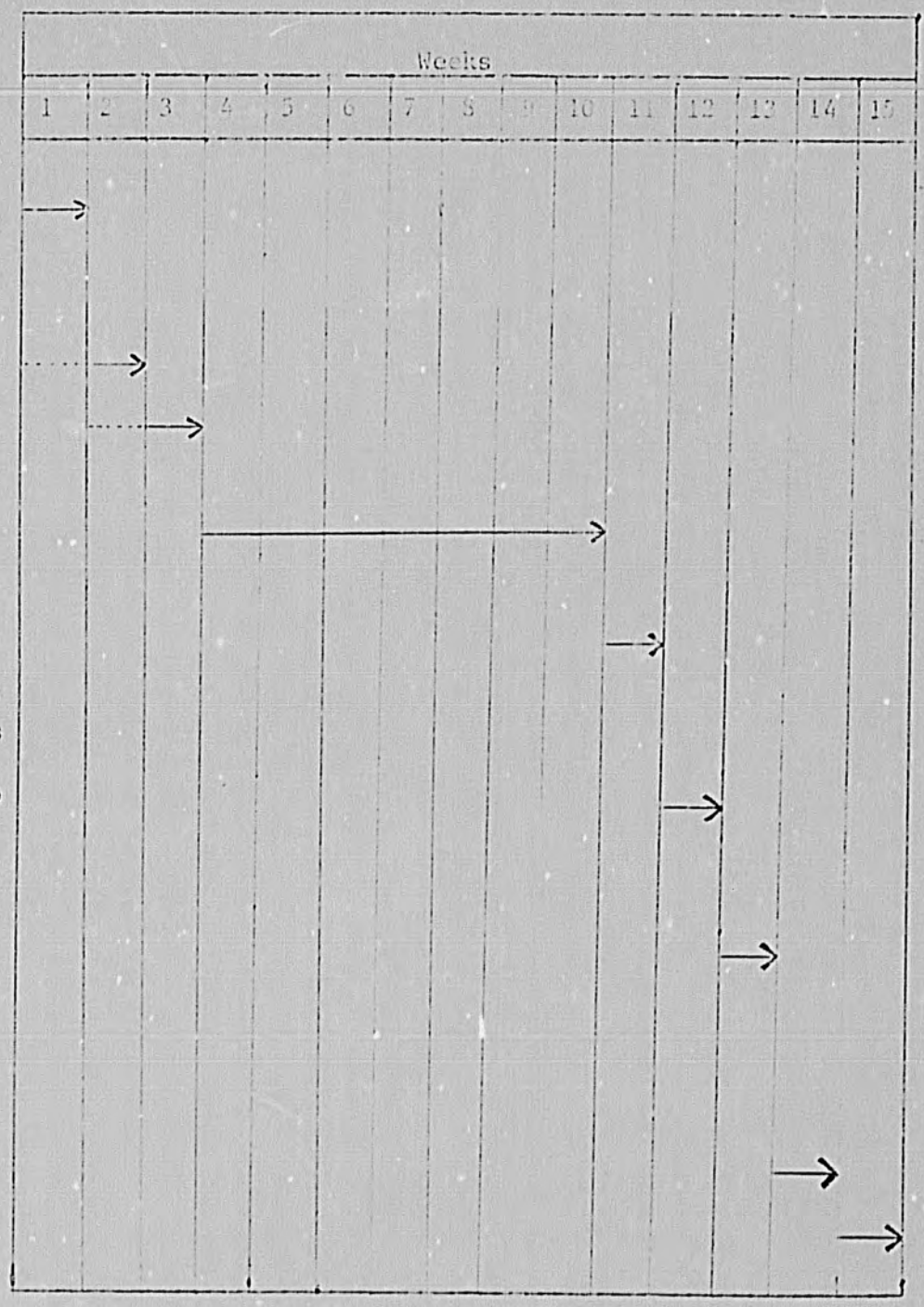
the deadline, this would still help reduce part of the load on RDI staff and expedite the pre-screening procedure.

2. There is some degree of duplication between RDR screening, outside specialists evaluation, and RDR final screening. It is recommended that after the proposals have gone through the pre-screening procedure and corrections have been made, they should be sent to outside specialists for critical evaluation. The role of RDR and committee meetings at the early stage should be limited to considering the list of specialists appropriate for the scope and substance of each proposal.

3. Each proposal should be assigned to 3 specialists, and a decision should be based on the majority opinion. This would have several advantages. Firstly, by relying on more than one person's opinion, a fairer and more balanced view can be obtained. Secondly, when consistent and coherent comments are obtained from two specialists, there is no need to wait for the third opinion, and hence the process can be made faster. The idea of sending each proposal to 3 specialists is already being considered and proposed by RDI Director, which is expected to receive full support from the committee.

4. The RDI at present compensates the specialist and amount of three hundred baht for the review of one proposal. Although most specialists do not attach any importance to this and consider their assignments as a favor to RDI and KKU, it is recommended that the rate of compensation be raised to five hundred baht per paper. This would be equivalent to the going rate of other institutions such as NIDA and TURA.

5. RDI should aim at completing the screening procedure within a period of three months. This is based on the opinion of most faculty members interviewed, who fell that the period of three months is reasonable for them to plan their activities and to release themselves from other commitments. The proposed procedures are as follows :



1. Deadline for research proposals to be submitted to RDI
2. Pre-screening
3. RDR meeting to assign outside specialists
4. Evaluation by specialists
5. RDR meeting to screen proposals, inform successful researchers
6. Researchers invited to clarify proposals, negotiations
7. Revised proposals resubmitted to RDI
8. Funds requested from USAID
9. Funds approved
10. Disbursement

6. The second invitation succeeded to draw about twenty proposals for screening. This is believed to be a normal number of proposals submitted for each invitation. If this is the case, research awards should be granted more frequently, perhaps twice a year. An interview with RDI staff indicated that this is possible, as they are capable of administering about 100 projects simultaneously.

E. Selection and Contracting Procedures

8.1 Selection Procedures

There are four steps in screening the proposals adopted by RDI. The criteria and purposes of each step are as follows :

Step one : Prescreening to examine the format and completeness of the proposals (by RDI staff).

Step two : Screening based on limiting criteria, to assess whether the proposed research will contribute to the social and economic well-being of rural-based population in Northeast Thailand (by RDR committee).

Step three: Evaluation of the quality of the proposals by specialists on the following aspects (by specialists).

1) Substance of the proposals

1.1) Relative importance of the research for rural development.

1.2) The research problems.

1.3) Objectives of the research.

1.4) Related studies which have been done by others and their results.

1.5) Research methodology.

2) Work plan

3) Plan for distribution of research result.

4) Budget

5) Researchers

Step four : Final screening based on comments of specialists and classification by researchers (by RDR committee).

The current RDR committee consists of the following :

1. RDI Director
2. RDI Deputy Director
3. KKU Vice Rector
4. Three associate professors from the Faculties of Agriculture, Health Science and Engineering
5. Two assistant professors from the Faculties of Science and Education
6. Three lecturers from the Faculties of Social Science, Nursing and Agriculture
7. One RDI researcher
8. One RDI administrative officer

Although the composition of the committee may suggest that it is represented by various faculties, this is not intended as the number of faculties in KKU is too large to have all faculties represented in the committee. However, it does represent a fair distribution of fields of

specialization. The committee is appointed by the Rector through the advice of the RDI Director. In general, each of the committee members is quite well recognized by the KKU academic community. However, there is a general feeling that many of the committee members are close friends and hence the current composition may not lead to fair and just selection of proposals.

One of the major issues raised during the interviews was whether the procedure and the process of screening lead to fair and just selection of proposals, whether this is acceptable, and what part of the procedure is objectionable. The reactions received from the interviews are rather mixed although, as might be expected, the majority of researchers who were not granted awards felt that the procedure and the committee were unfair. Some of the researchers whose proposals were rejected by the committee felt that the procedure was fair, but admitted that they lacked the experience to prepare a good proposal.

Among the researchers who felt the procedure was unfair, the following reasons were given :

1) Some of the committee members are rather "junior" and have yet to establish themselves as recognized researchers in the KKU academic community.

2) The composition of the committee does not reflect a fair distribution of various fields of specialization and hence they may not

be qualified to evaluate the proposals outside their areas of specialization. (Among the non-agriculture researchers it was felt that the field of agriculture was over-represented. Whereas agricultural researchers would point out that the two committee members from agriculture are specialists in crops (there was none from animal science, soil science, etc.).

3) The majority of the committee are "too close", and hence decisions to award the proposals may be influenced by this group.

4) The outside specialists are mostly stationed in Bangkok and they may not have sufficient knowledge about the conditions of the northeast to judge the relevancy of the proposals.

5) Some of the committee members are involved in the FSR project and hence may not be objective enough with regards to proposals which would compete with or duplicate their own research.

6) The RDR committee should give explanations for decisions and suggestions for improvement to unsuccessful applicants.

7) The pre-screening procedure was too rigid as the proposal format provided by RDI may not be appropriate for some research areas.

8) It is not fair to require researchers to prepare such a detailed proposal knowing full well that only part of the proposals would be granted awards.

In fact some of the comments summarized above were not based on sufficient evidence and were the results of misunderstanding concerning the actual procedures taken at each step of screening. When provided with explanation in the course of interviews, some researchers expressed surprise and showed appreciation of the procedure taken.

Some of the RDR committee members are indeed quite junior in terms of academic ranks, but in the consultant's opinion based on interviews and reviews of their academic backgrounds, there is no doubt in his mind that they are academically qualified. Going through the various reports of meetings, the consultant found that not every committee member was assigned to grade the proposals, and he believes that the committee did a good job in grading the proposals.

As regards the comments that the committee members are not qualified to evaluate certain areas of research proposals, this seems unfounded as the evaluation by this group is essentially on the relevance of the proposals to rural development rather than on the subject matter, which is referred to outside specialists. However, this comment may have a point. As the majority of the committee members are specialized in research areas with immediate impact on rural development, they may not have interest in, nor would likely to fully appreciate, the long-term and indirect impact of some research on rural development, such as the spiritual, cultural and educational aspects of development.

Concerning the closeness of committee members, this is beyond the capability of outsiders to make any judgement. But future appointments should attempt to restructure the composition taking these comments into consideration.

The role of outside specialists should also be defended here. Going through the papers, the consultant cannot but appreciate the insight of the specialists, especially the suggestions concerning related studies done elsewhere, methodologies, workplan, etc. These suggestions serve as valuable inputs for the final screening of the RDR Committee.

The role of FSR Project and its relation to RDR will be discussed in Part II.

With regards to the opinion that unsuccessful researchers should be given explanation of reasons for the decision, there are advantages as well as disadvantages in this issue. The RDR committee notes that this is not practiced by any other donor institutes. More importantly, there is an uneasy feeling that the explanations may lead to endless arguments and counter-arguments for which the committee members feel they cannot afford to take the time. On the other hand, if the number of rejected proposals is not too large, the committee may wish to supply selected comments and suggestions for improvements. But it should be made clear that no further arguments are accepted.

Finally, regarding the depth and length of proposals, the RDR committee already realizes the extent of this problem, and there is a suggesstion within the committee that the format for first-round proposals may me simplified. Researchers may submit a short but clear statement of the proposal, and if the committee finds that the idea is acceptable, further development into a full proposal would then be encouraged.

Recommendations

1. The RDR committee should be restructured with the following objectives :

   - to involve faculty members who are well recognized for their research and academic capabilities.
   - to replace some of the committee members who are overloaded with other responsibilities.
   - to obtain a more balanced composition of the committee in terms of areas of specialization as well as personal relationships.

2. Unsuccessful researchers should be supplied specific (and selective) comments and suggestions if they wish, and it should be made clear that no further explanation beyond this point will be made. Furthermore, for those

researchers who decide to revise their proposals according to the comments and suggestions given, the merit of the revised and resubmitted proposals will have to be compared with the new cohort of proposals, and there is no guarantee that the revised proposals will be granted an award automatically.

3. For those researchers who lack experience in preparing a good proposal, assistance should be provided through consultancy service. In fact, during the interviews the consultant had the impression that a number of faculty members do have the ability and interest to conduct research, but lack the experience to write a clear and sound proposal. It is recommended that the committee contact some of the researchers whose proposals have been rejected to find out in more detail the underlying problem, so that appropriate assistance may be provided. It should be stressed that for these researchers, the interest and perhaps the caliber is there, and they should be encouraged to participate in research. (This will be further discussed in section D, The Relevancy of Research being Proposed/Conducted).

B.2 Contracting Procedures

The researchers' comments on the contracting procedures may be summarized as follows :

1) The requirement for the researchers to submit monthly reports is too rigid and is especially burdensome for small projects and for those researchers who lack accounting knowledge.

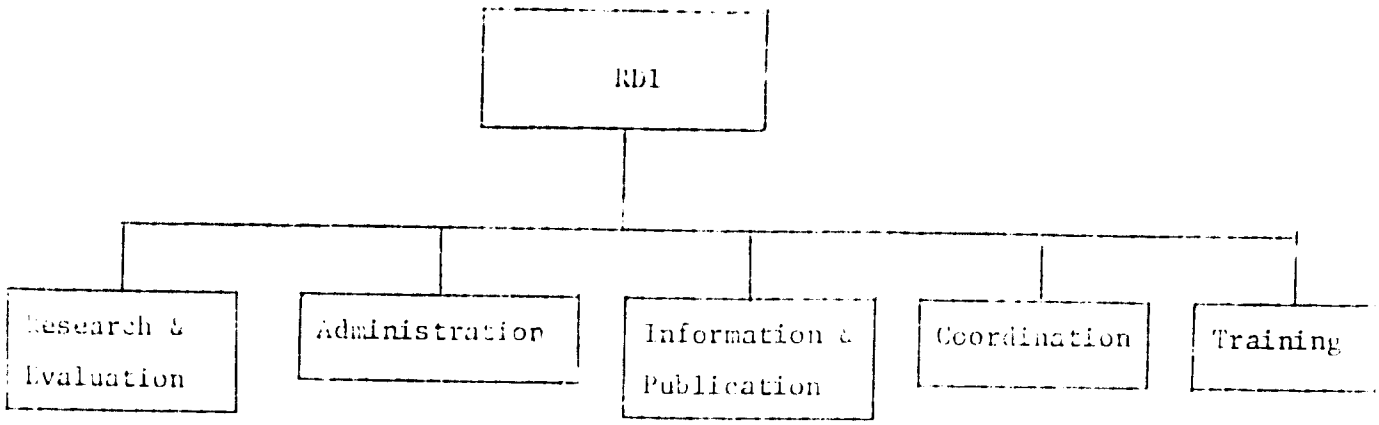
2) The requirement for the researchers to submit requests for quarterly disbursement, together with vouchers and receipts for the clearance of the previous quarter, two weeks before the beginning of the next quarter was also considered too rigid by some researchers. It was pointed out that in some cases there were considerable delays in obtaining receipts from governmental offices, and unexpected expenses frequently arise. As a result, the researchers who were not able to fulfill this requirement would have cash flow problem and often ran into debt.

3) Many researchers raised a question concerning the regulation bars the research grant awards to earn interest from bank deposits. This results in an implicit transfer of interest earned to the commercial banks.

Consultation with RDI administrative officers reveals that some of these problems can be solved, and in fact have been solved. For instance, RDI staff have simplified the accounting form and helped the researchers prepare the monthly reports. The quarterly disbursement procedures have also been simplified.

C. Administration of USAID Grant Funds

C.1 KKU Staffing. KKU is comprised of five sections, shown in the following organization chart.



The Research and Evaluation Section is primarily responsible for the coordination of research activities within KKU. The functions of Administrative and Information/Publication Sections are self-explanatory. The Coordination Section is envisioned to play a liaison role with outside government, non-government, business, private and voluntary organizations. The Training Section's function is to arrange, coordinate and conduct research methodology and research application training for researchers, field workers, extension agents and others. The two sections responsible for AID funded grant activities are the Research and Evaluation, and the Administration Sections.

The Project Paper specifies that RDI requires a financial manager, an administrative manager, three project administrative assistants, and one driver/messenger to staff its Administration Section. KKU is expected to obtain approval from the Civil Service Commission for these additional positions and to obtain budgeted funds to support them in the future. Both USAID and DTEC have agreed to initially finance these staff costs under the Project on a cost share basis. While USAID will be responsible for the project related travel costs of the RDI administrative staff through the life of the project, DTEC agrees to pick up the salary costs of all 6 positions in the first year, 4 positions in the second year, and 2 positions in the third year. By the fourth year of the project, KKU will be responsible to fund all staff positions from budgeted funds or from its own resources.

These six positions have all been filled, with two being now funded by KKU budgeted funds. Four employees are working under USAID operations, consisting of two administrative officers, a finance officer and a driver/messenger. At the management level are the RDI Director, a Deputy Director, and a local consultant employed under USAID funds who works closely with RDI Director. There are four typists. Two of these are being employed under KKU funds. The other two are being employed on a temporary basis and paid from DTEC counterpart funds.

Recruiting and retaining RDI staff are not without problems. Four employees under the USAID unit in RDI resigned during the last

fifteen months. The RDI's progress report for the period of May 1983 - October 1984 pointed out that the RDI has faced from the beginning a very serious problem in getting qualified graduates with bachelors degree in specific areas such as accounting and business administration. It was noted that qualified graduates generally prefer to work in Bangkok and are not interested in being employed as temporary staff for one year or more before becoming a civil servant. In some cases, some of them are not even looking forward to becoming a civil servant because of the salary level. In one case, it was reported that an administrative officer who had been working with RDI for almost one year resigned from her position right at the time she was eligible to become a civil servant. An additional problem is the lack of housing facilities and quite expensive rent in Khon Kaen.

To solve these problems, RDI changed its strategy by employing graduates who are from Khon Kaen or nearby towns. This strategy has proved successful so far, and the current staff seem quite happy and efficient in their jobs.

C.2 The Administration of USAID Grant Funds

Shortly after the operations of the RDR Project, RDI's financial plan for the first 15 months was submitted to USAID in an agreement between the three parties, USAID, ETEC and RDI. A total funding of 5,983,259 Baht ($260,142) was received by RDI for the period

of July 1983 - October 1984. During this period, RDI was informed by a few project leaders that they were facing difficulty of the cash flow situation. Some of them want inter-[illegible] for project equipment items. These were brought up for consultation with a USAID project officer, and were tackled subsequently.

To help the finance officers of each research project funded by USAID grant, a bookkeeping workshop was held to help these officers set up their bookkeeping procedures so as to provide proper accountability of their funds. Through this workshop, RDI staff are able to understand the nature of problems experienced by each finance officer and a good working relation is thus established.

At present, the RDI accounting officer and the local consultant have designed a much more simplified accounting form for research projects funded by USAID grant, and have transferred much of the bookkeeping procedures to its own staff. This has greatly released the burden of each project's financial officer, and has created a considerably good working relationship with the various researchers.

Recommendations

1. Some of RDI's current staff are in fact not looking forward to becoming a civil servant because of the salary level. If they choose to be employed by BTEC counterpart

funds, they should not be made civil servants against their will, since they are likely to resign as in the previous cases. It is recommended that MTEC counterpart funds be extended to employ them throughout the life of the project if they so choose.

2. For those employees whose employment is switched from MTEC counterpart funds to KKU budget in the second and third years, and who are willing to become civil servants, negotiations should be made with the Civil Service Commission to raise the initial salary to compensate for the time lost and to account for the experience gained.

3. For research projects with relatively small fundings and short period of study, the requirements for monthy report should be relaxed and the procedures be simplified.

4. Considering the current workload of the RDI Director, he should appoint two more deputy directors who are capable of making decisions on his behalf in administrative and academic affairs.

D. The Relevancy of Research being Proposed/Conducted

D.1 Open-invitation research

One major criterion used in screening and selecting research proposals was the project's contribution to the social and economic well-being of the rural-based population in Northeast Thailand. Priority was also given to research which has the following characteristics:

1. Research which facilitates the development of the research capability of currently less active faculty.

2. Proposals which are tied to broader research programs or as a follow-on to already conducted research so that the end results will be a larger body of knowledge directed at specific development constraints.

3. Research which involve KKU students in its implementation.

4. Research proposals that include financing from other sources.

5. Research proposals which are supportive and complementary to research financed under the Japanese Agricultural Development Research Project.

6. Proposals which emphasize farmer participation and are oriented toward field-level implementation.

7. Proposals which show clear linkages between research to be conducted and the upgrading of teaching requirements.

Based on these criteria, the following 10 projects were selected out of a total 72 proposals:

Research area	No. of grants	Amount granted	Funding as % of Total
1. Health delivery system	1	[illegible]	[illegible]
2. Energy sources	1	382,954	9.45%
3. Rural diseases	2	64[illegible],997	15.89%
4. Animal husbandry/ Nutrition disease	2	822,352	20.30%
5. Agricultural engineering	2	982,373	24.25%
6. Fishery	1	499,650	12.33%
7. Nutrition	1	484,708	11.96%
	10	4,051,822	100.00

Judging the objectives and methodologies of these proposals against the screening and selection criteria described above, the question of relevancy of these research projects would be hard to challenge. It is important to point out, however, that the impact of these projects on rural development in the Northeast is not likely to be fully realized in the short run, and therefore a long term assessment of the impact would be useful and should be carried out in the future.

D.2 Commissioned research

Apart from these research projects, RDR has taken further steps to encourage more research, partly to achieve the objects of USAID Grants and partly to encourage other faculty members of KKU who have not been very active in research activity, particularly the Faculties of Science, Education, and Humanities and Social Sciences. This portion of the research effort is called commissioned research in the Project Paper. The RDR committee was divided into three groups according to the specialization of each committee member. Each group met to discuss and identify research topics within their areas of specialization and consulted with the deans of the Faculties mentioned in order to identify the researchers for each topic. Consultative meetings between RDR comittee and the selected researchers were then held to work out methodologies as well as possible work plan. At this stage, three research proposals are being prepared :

1) Industrialization for the Northeast, prepared by researchers from the Faculty of Science.
2) A Study of the Existing Capacity of Educational Institutions Providing Adult and Continuing Education Programs for Rural Communities in the Northeast, prepared by researchers from the Faculty Education.
3) Study on the History of Villages, still in the process

of having its research team organized, which will include potential researchers from Teachers College under the guidance of researchers from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The final outcomes of these proposals are not known at the time of writing this report, but there were criticisms concerning the RDR committee's approach in selecting researchers. According to some of the faculty members interviewed, the Deans tend to have their own groups of favorite researchers and are not likely to disseminate the information to other faculty members. Thus, the approach may lead to unfair selection of researchers to participate in the projects.

In addition to the above activities, RDI has organized two seminar/workshops to encourage more researchers to participate in the commissioned research. The first seminar was held September 6-7, 1984, on the topic of "Rural Northeast : Problems and Directions for Research." Twenty participants were invited from various groups including rural development workers, farmers, monks, government officials, and experienced researchers from other universities. The purpose of this seminar was to identify relevant areas and topics of research. The seminar ended with suggestions for eight areas of research, and within each area about 4-5 topics with suggested approaches for research were given.

The second seminar/workshop was conducted on November 3, 1984, on the topic of Non-formal Education. Again, relevant topics and research approaches were discussed and suggested.

RDI intends to disseminate the reports of these seminars with a view to attracting researchers to develop proposals for RDI support.

Recommendations

1. RDI should disseminate the suggested list of topics for research to as many researchers as possible and should establish its own channel of contacts with various researchers in addition to contacts through the Deans in order to ensure a broader base and a more equitable selection procedure.

2. It should be admitted that a considerable number of faculty members lack the experience to conduct independent research, and, in some cases, lack the ability to prepare a good and acceptable proposal. It is therefore recommended that consultancy services be provided to help the weak faculty members develop proposals to be funded by RDI.

3. It should be pointed out that those researchers who failed to receive research grants from the first group of awards deserve close consideration for commissioned research.

The consultant has an impression that many of these researchers have fairly good ideas about what they want to research, but lack the experience to write a clear and reasonable proposal. More importantly, it is very certain that the eagerness to research is there. It remains for RDI to provide technical as well as financial support to these faculty members to develop them into good researchers in the future.

Part II : The Integrated Farming Systems Research

The Integrated Farming Systems Research is a well established set of research activities, which involves research in crops, livestock and social sciences, using farming systems research (FSR) methodology and techniques developed under a previous FSR program financed by Ford Foundation.

The Project Paper stated that KKU faculties proposing research in this area will work closely with the FSR Advisory Committee as well as with staff from other donor projects to develop research priorities. A mechanism for determining actual village needs and feeding these back into the research program will also be developed. It also stipulated that early in the first year of the project, a list of FSR activities will be identified for year 1 funding, and that these initial research activities will form the basis of subsequent FSR.

In May 1983, FSR Advisory Committee was set up with 12 committee members who are experts from different subject areas both from KKU and outside the university. The committee approved the operation of FSR project as outlined in the Project Paper. In addition to the Advisory Committee, the Financial Control Committee was also set up. Administrative personnel and research personnel were also appointed.

FSR has been divided into three main sections, namely, Crops, Animal Science, and Social Science Systems. The research plan including the sub-projects in each of the three main sections was proposed, and

approximately thirty researchers were involved in the whole project.

The FSR research operation started at the end of February 1984. The start-up work involved study and research on the basic structural information of the villages by using the Rapid Rural Appraisal Techniques and also doing research on crops system, animal systems, and social science aspects of the villages in the Northeast area. The FSR project has a good beginning and is in the hands of the best researchers from KKU. It is viewed as a model for multi-disciplinary research at KKU.

A midterm and final evaluation of FSR are still to be conducted by a team of US and Thai consultants. These evaluations should assess the performance of FSR in the following areas :

1. Coordination between FSR and RDR to ensure that there is no undue duplication of research and that research results of the two projects complement each other to the extent possible.

2. The impact of FSR on participating farmers as well as the rural population in the Northeast in general, the impact being measured in terms of changing production patterns, the level of well-being, change in attitudes, etc.

3. The extent to which new and weak researchers are given the

opportunity to participate in and learn from the research. The success in this aspect may be measured in terms of the number of new researchers participating in the research, academic achievement and promotion in academic rank of junior researchers as the result of participating in the research or after completion of research.

4. The linkage of FSR with government implementing agencies, such as the Departments of Agricultural Extension and Agriculture, NESDB, BOAAC, etc., to ensure a close coordination in research design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The success in this area may be measured in terms of the number of research projects implemented, the participation of outside officials in the various stages of research, and major aspects of the research adopted by the implementing agencies.

Overall Conclusion

The consultant was fortunate to receive very good cooperation from the various people in KKU, particularly, all the faculty members and administrators sampled for his interviews. The frank and earnest discussions greatly helped him prepare this evaluation report.

In spite of the numerous problems discussed, the consultant is confident that these are not insurmountable. The Project is in the hands of very able researchers and administrators. With the experience gained over time, RDI would serve as KKU's very efficient facilitator and coordinator for research activities as envisaged in the Project Paper. The consultant is also confident that the Project would provide opportunities for KKU faculty members to develop good and useful research for the development of the rural Northeast.