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PROSTHETIC PROJECT IN LAOS

A Report Prepared By PRITECH Consultant:  
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During The Period:  
NOVEMBER 3 - 23, 1989

TECHNOLOGIES FOR PRIMARY HEALTH CARE (PRITECH) PROJECT  
Supported By The:  
U.S. Agency For International Development  
CONTRACT NO: AID/DPE-5969-Z-00-7064-00  
PROJECT NO: 936-5969

AUTHORIZATION:  
AID/S&T/HEA: 5/3/90  
ASSGN. NO: HSS 067-LA

## LAOS FIELD TRIP REPORT

The proposed prosthetics project in Laos is feasible, technically warranted, and politically welcome. Its principal problem will be the coordination and management of its several components in the absence of an A.I.D. Mission. The components are:

1) Expansion of the Handicap International (HI) program both geographically and substantively. HI is now operating in Vientiane and six provinces providing physical therapy and prosthetic devices. The proposal would expand their activity to an additional five provinces and add orthotics (bracing). To accomplish this, the present expatriate staff of two physical therapists will be augmented by one (preferably a prosthetist), a motorcycle will be provided to each Provincial workshop to allow community outreach, and a four wheel drive pickup truck will be provided to HI's National center workshop to transport component parts (feet, knees) which can be more efficiently "mass-produced" on machinery currently available at the National center.

2) Physician Training will take place at the Mahosot Teaching Hospital in Vientiane for both medical students and continuing education for provincial doctors. Orthopedic surgeons, plastic surgeons and nurses, working as teams on a rotating basis for two-three months will upgrade the quality of the surgery now being performed. Basic orthopedic tools will be provided to the provincial doctors to take back to their hospitals. An initial survey of the facilities and arrangements will require the services of an orthopedic surgeon. Health Volunteers Overseas (Nancy Kelly, Executive Director) is the organization backstopping the previous A.I.D. prosthetics projects in the provision of physicians and should be asked to do the survey in Laos, as well as the recruitment of the rotating teams.

3) A proposal is being prepared by the National Rehabilitation Center which will probably include equipment, supplies and training. An initial oral request for a complete surgical unit at the Center including the construction of a new building was strongly discouraged by the team. The final request, after approval through various levels of the government, may be slow in coming and may include items beyond the scope of this project (a school for handicapped children was mentioned).

4) A demand study and public education program are two program areas in which World Concern is seen as taking lead responsibility. An initial proposal for a disability census has been prepared by World Concern which can be the basis of a demand study for prosthetic devices, braces and physical therapy. The team noted the lack of public education and awareness of the danger posed by the large numbers of unexploded bombs -- the primary cause of amputations and crippling accidents in Laos. Simple cartoon posters showing the types of anti-personnel mines and warning children not to touch shell casings, basic warning signs on known dangerous areas, and use of the ubiquitous public address systems in markets all seemed feasible and inexpensive, yet none are done and 200-300 people per year are still being killed and wounded by shells.

The proposed management entity for the project is World Concern, an A.I.D.-registered PVO with a resident American in Vientiane (David Andrianoff), and Asia headquarters in Bangkok (Director - Paul Kennel). Preliminary conversations with each of these men were positive and enthusiastic. It was unfortunate timing (Andrianoff's departure on home leave and our delayed return to Bangkok) which prevented further conversations to confirm our understandings of World Concern's interest and ability to manage the project. World Concern's Asia headquarters office is in the same building as USAID/Bangkok, and assuming USAID/Bangkok's willingness to handle the logistics, followup with Paul Kennel should be done as soon as possible.

The subject of clearing mine fields was raised repeatedly by PVO groups, by Provincial officials and by the team in its discussions. While the equipment and training for such a program would be military and not directly a part of the project, the prevention of disability is a major project focus and there is no question that the explosives left from the war are the largest cause of disabilities. The team was told that DOD is prepared to offer such assistance and that the offer has been made at least twice officially and rejected (on political grounds) by the Lao Government. In any project discussions with the Hill sponsors of the program, with State, the Embassy or Lao officials, the team strongly urges that every effort be made to deal with this continuing source of needless death and dismemberment.

There is a draft proposal from HI which must be approved by HI headquarters in France. The National Center proposal does not have a clear timetable. Travel logistics prevented full discussion with World Concern. No discussion has yet taken place with Health Volunteers Overseas. A preliminary chat with Steve Mintz of USAID/Bangkok indicated a willingness to consider backstopping this project, but further talks are needed. This project has its pieces laid out, but there is still the job of putting the pieces together and getting the documentation written. The grant agreement for the Mozambique prosthetics project should serve as a model for the paperwork -- what is needed now is some design officer legwork.



Bernie Chapnick