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**POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL  
COMMUNITIES IN ASIA**

A report of a preliminary study of the community development  
programs in four Asian countries and the potential of these  
programs as a means for promoting the growth of participant  
societies through United States assistance

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## INTRODUCTION

The following report summarizes the conclusions and recommendations resulting from a brief survey of the community development programs in four Asian countries and of the potential of these programs to provide a channel through which United States assistance can initiate or accelerate the growth of local institutions for self-government. It is a preliminary look at the question of whether the community development approach provides a means by which the United States can promote the growth of participant societies in rural Asia. Although the research and field trips were limited to four Asian countries (the Philippines, Thailand, India, and Nepal), it is believed that the conclusions and recommendations have validity at least as initial hypotheses in the analysis of the potentialities of community development programs as an instrument of American policy in the underdeveloped nations.

The choices of these four particular Asian countries is not significant except in that they represent national programs in community development which have progressed to different levels combined with a similar approach in United States assistance in each case.

Most of the summary which follows was given on October 1, 1962 as a presentation by Mr. Boyce of AIRINC to a group of AID and Department of State officials chaired by Mr. Harry Shooshan.\* Some portions concerning the implications for AID programming and operations were developed in two subsequent informal meetings between Mr. Shooshan and Mr. Boyce. At

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\* In addition to Mr. Shooshan, the meeting was attended by Dr. Edward C. Fei and Dr. H. L. Naylor of REPAS; Mr. Lewis Miniclier, ESD Community Development; Mr. H. Wriggins and Mr. J. Fried, Policy Planning Council; Dr. D. Ensminger, Ford Foundation and AID consultant, and Mr. Karl B. Hill, AIRINC.

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the second of these meetings, Mr. Shooshan asked that the conclusions and recommendations be summarized and submitted as a written report.

#### THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

This study program was undertaken under Contract No. AIDc-2151 for the Community Development Division of ICA. With the dissolving of ICA, the program passed under the control of the REPAS office of AID, and the monitorship of Dr. H. L. Naylor of that office.

The research consisted of (1) review of all available published materials including those in the Community Development library of ICA, the Community Development Division files, and the files of the missions visited on the field trips, as well as all published materials from the host-country governments, and (2) field trips to the four countries concerned. On the first field trip, in late 1961, Mr. Boyce visited the missions in Bangkok and New Delhi. On the second, in mid-summer 1962, Mr. Boyce, accompanied by Dr. Naylor, visited the missions in Manila, Bangkok, and Kathmandu. During these trips he interviewed the mission staff members and host-country government officials as well as representatives of American foundations and others who it was felt would have insights into the potential of community development as a means of developing institutions for local self-government. During his visit to Bangkok in December 1961, Mr. Boyce, accompanied by Mr. J. S. Turner, Development Advisor, visited the critical northeast area to inspect the community development program in operation in a series of villages.

The contract funds available permitted a thorough investigation of all printed sources which could be found and visits to each mission of an average duration of a week. A total of approximately 19 man-weeks was spent on the project, broken down into approximately 12 weeks of senior

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staff time (primarily Mr. Boyce) and seven weeks of junior staff time.

In addition to the materials presented to the group on October 3rd and to Mr. Shooshan in two subsequent meetings, which are summarized in the following two working papers: Community Development and Political Development in India, and the other on United States Assistance in Community Development: An Exploration of Underlying Assumptions and Alternatives, were prepared as AIRINC staff documents.\*

#### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN FOUR ASIAN COUNTRIES

The four countries studies are markedly different in many social and political respects; however, after describing briefly the political dimensions of the national community development programs in each, it is possible to reach some preliminary conclusions as to the political implications of community development programs in such areas.

1. The Philippines. The Philippines have an advanced program in community development thanks partly to United States economic and technical assistance. The political implications of the program are manifold and obvious, and focus on the legal status and functioning of the village barrio councils.

Four things seem to have combined to give the Philippines a political structure at the local level which is vital and developing a quality of local political participation unique among the countries studied, and probably unique in Asia, outside of Japan. These are:

(a) A commitment to and a belief in the community development program on the part of the top political leaders. The view

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\* Although prepared as a basis for discussion by the AIRINC staff, AIRINC will be pleased to loan copies of these papers to interested persons in AID.

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of the leadership of the program not only does not soft-pedal the local political implications, as in India, but endorses and supports them. This endorsement is partly a heritage of President Magsaysay, which has been carried on since his death and was very apparent in the national elections in early 1961.

(b) The establishing of the legal status of the barrio councils and the training of citizens as to their rights and obligations under the barrio charters combined with

(c) The use of these barrio councils as a focus for community development efforts.

(d) A well organized community development bureaucracy within the government adequately staffed and financed and capable of attracting and training intelligent and well-educated youth as village-level workers.

These are obvious features of the Philippine program. In appraising the Philippine program and the possible application of its features to other areas, the politico-cultural base of Philippine society must also be considered. The origins of the political value system of contemporary Philippine culture may owe a good deal to the American colonial period and particularly to the American educational system which was transplanted to the islands. Whatever the origins, the cultural matrix in the Philippines is not only not resistant to the development of true political power at the local level, but places a positive value on such growth. It is this political base which made possible and effective the Magsaysay approach, as well as the legal institution of the barrio councils and their growing role in local government. One frequently heard comment during the interviews with Americans in Manila was to the characterization of Philippine politics as

perpetuating the worst aspects of American machine politics of the early twentieth century. This point of view can certainly be substantiated by even a cursory reading of the Manila press; however, it is also evidence of the vitality of Philippine politics, and the importance of the political side of Philippine life. Furthermore, the work in civic training at the village level and the work in community development being undertaken through the barrio councils is evidence of an increasingly participant and politically responsible society at the local level.

2. Thailand. In almost any respect the community development program in Thailand is less advanced than that of the Philippines. It is of more recent origin and of less geographic coverage. Originally begun in the south and the northeast of Thailand, the Vietnam and Laotian problems have resulted in a concentration of effort in the northeast, particularly in the Laos border area.

The strengths of the Philippine program are the weaknesses of the Thai effort. First and most striking, is the lack of any clear commitment on the part of the top government officials to the program. There is no lack of official endorsements of community development, many, probably not without reason, with a distinctly American flavor. However, one has a feeling speaking with interested upper and mid-level Thai officials that their commitment to the program is somewhat superficial, perhaps analagous to the commitment to democratic forms in the years following the Versailles treaty, and that if their innermost thoughts were known they would reveal a feeling that community development represents a grafting of Western concepts to a Thai political base in a way which is impractical and probably unnatural. Evidence of this is the struggle which has gone on within the Thai government over which ministry would have the re-

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sponsibility for the program and the in-fighting within the Ministry of Interior once that Ministry was selected, all of which has made it impossible to legally establish a community development bureau to date. Additional evidence lies in the attitude of the government and particularly the officials responsible for the acting community development bureau toward the AID Community Development Advisor and his staff. Far from accepting advice in planning and programming, AID is usually informed only after an action has been taken and often only by receiving copies of the printed directives implementing the action.

Much of this seems to stem from the central fact of Thai political life which is that Thailand is substantially the city state of Bangkok. Power has traditionally radiated outward from the throne in Bangkok and continues to do so. Any real threat to this centralization through the growth of local political power would certainly be opposed by the present elite. The local village councils have no legal status and so far as could be determined, the idea has not been seriously considered. Based on a short tour of villages in the northeast in connection with this study, the village councils concerned in the community development effort seem to see themselves primarily as recipients of aid from the central government and probably have no concept of themselves as holding, even potentially, any local political power in their own right.

Briefly, while the politico-cultural base in the Philippines is favorable to the community development program as conceived the American advisors, that of Thailand is not.

The pressures of Communist infiltration in the northeast have made less casual the interest of some of the Thai government leadership

who see a counter insurgency potential in the program; nonetheless, this heightened interest contains no apparent thought of diffusing the political power of Bangkok into the rural areas.

The picture in Thailand is not, however, all negative. On the affirmative side is the relatively well-developed and efficient (compared say to Burma, Viet Nam or Indonesia) civil bureaucracy which extends from the central government down to the district (amphur) level. At the local level the community development program works through these district offices. Thus the central government's representation in the provinces, traditionally a control and punitive device, is becoming a means of bringing a new and more progressive image of the Bangkok government to the villages.

3. India. India is in a class by itself only from the standpoint of size. Here is the largest community development program of the four countries and in many ways the most advanced. Compared with the time the program has been in existence, the political emphasis has been slow in coming. It consists of giving legal status in local government (particularly for community development purposes) to the traditional village councils or panchayats. The system has been further elaborated by establishing elected bodies from this panchayat base at both the block and the district level.

The strengths of the Indian program are similar to those of the Philippines. They include a top government leadership committed to the community development program as a means of developing local institutions of self-government operating in a cultural environment whose traditions and political value system permit and even encourage such democratic decentralization as the panchayat raj program was originally

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called. Added to this is the exceptional (for Asia) civil service, including a well-developed and well-staffed Ministry of Community Development. Finally, a legally sanctioned system of village councils--the panchayats--working not only at the village but also at the block and district level.

The weakness of the program, if it can be called that, is that the village panchayats have not become the focus of national political party rivalry in the manner of the barrio councils of the Philippines. In fact, the point of view that party politics should stop at the district level is widely voiced in India and endorsed by at least one prominent American authority on the Indian program.\* However, from the limited evidence available, it would appear that political factions and groups have increased somewhat at the below district level since the introduction of panchayat raj.

4. Nepal. Nepal is much less advanced than any of the other three countries studied, and this fact must be kept in mind in appraising the present community development program or its potentialities in terms of local political development. After a number of years of a village development program, Nepal has introduced a panchayat program modeled in concept after that of India. This new program has the obvious if not overt objective of strengthening the political power of the King's party in the villages. Lacking even a basic civil bureaucracy the countryside, the existence of a community development organization with some 1400 village level workers through the country is itself poli-

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\* As director of the Ford Foundation in India, Dr. Douglas Engsminger has been very influential in the development of the community development program in India from its beginning.

tically significant. The first panchayat elections were held in 1962. It is yet too early to see whether they will become a viable focus of local political development.

By the criteria used in the other three countries, such as the commitment of the throne to the program and the legal sanction given the panchayats as units of local government, the Nepalese situation would seem to hold promise. However, the primitiveness of the country and the inadequacy of government organization, including community development and the necessary supporting services, may very well make this promise one which at best will be a long time in realization. One fact illustrates this well: In the Philippines nearly all the village level workers are college graduates, whereas in Nepal the average educational achievement of the workers is second or third grade.

##### 5. Conclusions.

From even so brief a survey, certain generalizations are apparent and might be summarized as follows:

(a) Relationship of the community development program to the cultural environment. The program, present or potential, can be evaluated only in terms of its operation within an environmental context. This would appear an obvious truism, but it has evidently been frequently overlooked by the American planners of economic aid and technical assistance in community development. In some cases the social and political value system permits or encourages the development of local institutions of self-government as in the Philippines or India. In others, as Thailand, it does not. This does not mean that nothing should be attempted in Thailand; it does mean that the selecting of feasible program goals must first consider the context of the cultural environment in which the

program will operate. This is not easy to do as it involves interrelating a complex series of variables. It is, however, the key to successful programming.

(b) Importance of top government support. Closely related to the first conclusion is the equally obvious one (also frequently overlooked): that the potential of the program as a means of developing local political institutions is in direct proportion to the extent of commitment of the host government leadership. This is particularly true in those countries which include much of Asia, where power is highly centralized at the top.

(c) Importance of government organization and effective public administration. The importance of an adequate organization in the host government to carry out a community development program seems to have received too little emphasis. The bringing of technical services and grants-in-aid to the villages through the person of the multi-purpose village level worker requires a relatively sophisticated organization not only in community development, but in the technical services, agriculture, health, education, and other fields which are made available through the village level worker. Even the Indian government, with the splendid heritage of the Indian Civil Service, has difficulty in maintaining an adequate civil bureaucracy down to the village level. In Nepal no AID program involving village participation can be realistically considered without reference to the almost total lack of effective public administration. The AID mission in Nepal has quite properly placed primary emphasis on the reorganization of the public administration of Nepal as a sine qua non of American assistance.

(d) Importance of legally constituted village councils. Although the community development programs have evoked participation on the part of

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villagers in working together on community projects, it seems probable that such participation does not take on meaningful political overtones until and unless it is legally institutionalized. A legally constituted village council with some real and recognized power would appear a necessary prerequisite for any viable political development.

#### UNITED STATES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The survey of the four countries included not only examination of the national community development programs, but also the relationship of American technical and economic assistance to these programs. The question posed was not only the viability of the community development ~~approach~~ as a means of developing participant societies in the emerging nations, but also the prospects of encouraging such development through United States assistance.

Most of the time available was spent studying the community development programs of the four countries. However, the field work was done with the community development staffs in the Philippines, Thailand and Nepal, and with the agriculture staff in India (there being no technical assistance in community development in India at the present); Mr. Boyce had the opportunity of interviewing in each mission nearly all AID representatives concerned with any aspect of village work. Despite the relatively brief exposure to the mission programs in this area, some general observations can be made which will serve at least as points of departure for further investigation.

1. Programming problems. Technical assistance, like politics, might be called the art of the possible. It is essential to be able to estimate what is possible and what is not and what the expected return may be for one course of action as opposed to an alternative. Although

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there seems to be an awareness of the importance of the generalizations given above, there also seems to have been little attempt to put together these and other variables which in total would define the limits of possible action in a given country program and thus provide the basis for operational programming.

We at AIRINC, influenced by the success we have had in the development of a type of social systems analysis which makes possible the interrelation of such a complex series of variables regarding foreign societies, are convinced that such a system could be developed for AID, which would relate operational components of the proposed assistance or aid programs to the environmental context in which the aid was being extended. Considerable work has been done by our firm over the past six years in applying this general approach to predicting developments in foreign societies of an economic, political and social nature. This work has been sponsored primarily by the Department of Defense, supplemented by various major overseas American corporations.

A systematic approach of this sort should make it possible to estimate how much might be achieved in Thailand, for example, for a given expenditure of funds, effort and time, and to compare this with similar inputs in say Nepal.

Without some sort of programming which accounted for the very complex series of variables which affect any proposed program, it is impossible to estimate how effective a program of technical assistance and economic aid in support of the development of local institutions of self-government might prove.

2. Operational problems. The most serious operational problems follow directly from lack of sufficient programming depth. The key

to successful organization is the combination of feasible goals and the organizational ability to achieve these goals. Without adequate programming it is impossible to establish viable goals and difficult to judge either the organization or its constituent individuals, since these judgments can be only with reference to such goals. Thus organization in the usual sense is not possible and one has instead, in this case, a loosely knit group of individual technicians. Many are doing outstanding work, but as individuals rather than as parts of a co-ordinated organization.

Within this group of community development technicians there is what is often considered the long-term or ultimate goal of their efforts. This goal is articulated in various forms and seems generally to underlie the technical assistance efforts in this field. This goal is **the expectation that** by improving the material conditions of the villagers through self-help projects, a socio-psychological awakening or change will occur which will enable the spirit of co-operation stimulated through these projects, to develop into a self-generating community spirit. However, this cannot be considered an organizational goal, at least at our present level of understanding social change and its measurement. The indicators of social change which would measure progress toward such an objective have not been developed, and without such measurement organizational achievement cannot be estimated, and effective organization is hardly possible.

Though this long-term goal of social change through material change is actually more nearly an ideology, a common set of ideas uniting persons working in this field, than a goal, its importance as an integrative element and source of inspiration to the persons engaged in the program should not be underestimated. In contrast, the operational realities

of technical assistance in community development provide a much better area for establishing viable operational goals. The work of the community development advisors consists largely of attempting (through advice or economic aid) to develop in the host country a government bureaucracy which will make possible the provision of technical services and grants-in-aid for village improvement available to the villages. Central to this operational concept of community development is the multi-purpose or village-level worker. This community development employee, stationed in a village and working with a group of villagers, provides the link between the village and the government and the channel through which the various technical services of the government are directed to the village.

Since (through much of Asia, at least), the rural village image of the central government is still primarily a punitive one, the first step toward integrating the rural areas into the national life and ultimately toward developing a truly participant society, is to break down this point of view and replace it with a more progressive, developmental concept of the national governments. This can only be accomplished through bringing the villagers into a liaison with the central government that will demonstrate a positive continuing interest in their welfare. The community development machinery provides an excellent means for doing just this.

Put in other terms, there is little reason to debate whether or not community development will work the type of social magic which its ardent proponents believe, since in its operational mechanism it provides what is probably the best means available to AID in accomplishing the first steps toward encouraging the growth of participant societies in the new nations.

During the interviews with mission staffs, the point was frequently made that the technical services of the host government were better applied directly to the villages from the individual ministries. (This is one of the intra-agency conflicts referred to below.) This argument would seem to lose much of its validity when one considers that this could only be done by establishing a village level field staff in each relevant field. Since the level of technical knowledge required in the villages is relatively low, it would seem preferable to train a single group of multi-purpose workers representative of all the necessary technical services, and more in line with the realities of available personnel and funds in most underdeveloped areas.

3. Intra- and inter-agency conflict. The dissention within the AID missions regarding village work are too well known to discuss at length. Resolution of these conflicting points of view is essential to the success of any program in this area.

In Thailand, obvious problems in the differences in viewpoint among the various U. S. Government groups (DOD, CIA, USIA, AID) concerned with the northeast area require a basis for co-operative action which can only be provided if there is a clearer definition of feasible goals. Essentially, the civic action, political action and community development proponents aim at accomplishing the same thing: The political-military stability of the northeast area. Their proposed means are different primarily in terms of what they feel can be accomplished in a given time and partly because they feel different political or military urgencies. The AID mission, for example, seems little influenced by the political implications of the Laos frontier area. Mr. Boyce, in his interviews with mission officials in Thailand, was unable to find anyone with more

than superficial information regarding Communist village activities, and, in fact, was informed by one of the senior mission officers that it was not the business of the mission to be informed as to what the Communists were doing in this field.

## CONCLUSIONS

Three general conclusions can be drawn from this study. Though stated above, they are repeated here for emphasis.

1. Goals. The minimum goal for a program aimed at developing participant societies in the underdeveloped countries is to change the image of the central government in the villagers' eyes from a punitive one to a progressive and developmental one. The maximum goal is the establishment of functioning political bodies at the local level.

2. Means. Both goals are probably best achieved through the community development approach in that it combines promoting self-help and participation at the village level with the providing of relevant technical assistance through the multi-purpose worker.

3. United States assistance. The capability for effective U. S. support of these programs requires better programming with regard to environmental context in which the program operates and better organization to implement the programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was undertaken as a preliminary or pilot endeavor and planned as a first step toward further research into the potentialities of promoting the growth of participant societies through American assistance to the underdeveloped countries.

The problem of recommending further research for AID involves

not only what could be accomplished in the research as such, but more important, how the research product might ultimately be utilized by AID in the solution of its operational problems. The question is not one of acquiring more knowledge for its own sake, but of relating that knowledge to the AID program.

Although there is a long term need for a greater understanding of the problems of social change and particularly the possibilities of introducing, controlling, and estimating rates of change, this knowledge, if available (and there has been relatively little done to date in this field by social scientists), could not be utilized operationally by AID in the immediate future of perhaps five years. There are two reasons for this: one, the necessary research itself would require a period of several years, and two, once produced would probably be beyond the ability of AID to absorb operationally.

What is required in the immediate future is a more effective utilization of the knowledge which already exists or is available without substantial additional research effort. For example, there is within the experience of American technical assistance in community development a wealth of experience. In addition, partly with United States assistance, government research and evaluation programs have been carried out in two of the countries covered in this study (India and the Philippines). Furthermore, private United States foundations have sponsored scores of young scholars in village studies over the past several years. All of this represents a tremendous accumulation of information which, if gathered together and systematically organized and analyzed could provide the basis for developing a programming system for AID of the type described above.

Such a system would define the feasible goals for a program within a given country. The next step would be to develop the organization capable of carrying out these goals. This would involve a re-assessment of much of the personnel and organizational practice of AID as presently organized.

The difficulties of such a task should not be underestimated. It compares in complexity with the development of an advanced weapons system. Hopefully, if successfully carried out, it would serve exactly the opposite purpose.