Integrated Approach to Local Rural Development

Report of an Interdisciplinary Seminar
Makati, Philippines
31 March - 3 April 1975

Editor: Marilyn Campbell
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The Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement

Somchai Yoktri
Rural Reconstruction Worker, TRRM, Chai nat, Thailand

The foundation for the Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM) was registered in 1967 and was accepted under Royal Patronage in 1969.

Using the concept of rural reconstruction according to Dr Y. C. James Yen, President of the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, the work provides rural reconstruction workers (RRWS) to rural villages to help farmers improve their income, health, education, and to learn to become self-reliant. The RRWS began their work for TRRM on 1 May 1968. A group of 15 TRRM staff members was then sent for training for 3 months at the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction in Silang Cavite, Philippines.

Later, in September 1968, Chainat Province was chosen as the area of operation. Meanwhile, a survey of the villages and the selection of sites in the Sankhaburi District in which to establish the village centres, as well as an examination of the economic and social conditions of the area, were made and completed by December 1968. The RRWS were then sent out to work in the villages early in 1969, and the end of 1973 saw a completion of a 5-year operation between RRWS and the villagers.

The first 2 years were considered as a starting point of the operation, which has gradually expanded. In 1971 alone, 15 village centres were developed.

Method of Operation

Qualified workers in agriculture, education, health, and cooperatives have been recruited and sent by TRRM to live in the villages to discover farmers' needs and to act as leaders and coordinators to urge the farmers to change and improve their living conditions in the following ways.

- **Livelihood**
  RRWS help improve the methods of farming and gardening by introducing modern techniques in the selection of proper seeds that are better suited to soil conditions, and using fertilizers, water, and pesticides in a manner that conforms to modern technology.
  Moreover, farmers are urged to engage in other activities, such as raising swine and poultry, growing vegetables or other cash crops, or cottage industries such as mat or cloth weaving, pottery making, basket weaving, and carpentry, to earn supplementary income after the harvest is completed.

- **Health**
  Because of the prevalence of sickness among the poorer farmers, they are being taught methods of preventing disease, keeping their houses clean, using proper types of toilets and drainage, digging wells for clean water, eating proper hygienic foods, and improving their general health. Farmers will also be advised of the techniques of family planning.

- **Education**
  Education is promoted for children, youths, and adults so that they can use the knowledge gained to their own benefit. Education is the most important factor in achieving progress for the villages. TRRM advises and motivates farmers to adopt new attitudes, new ideas, and new technologies in simple forms to speed up their development and progress.
Group activities

So far, villages do not appreciate the importance of group activity, which is one of the most important factors when they try to market their produce and to raise capital, especially for purchasing the supply of inputs for their production. TRRM helps the farmers to help themselves in solving the individual problems of the group in their locality.

Farmers are encouraged to discuss and debate their problems in groups by training them in community living.

Achievements

During the initial period in 1969 TRRM operated in 13 villages in four subdistricts (Huey Krod, Tieng Tae, Poh Ngarm, and Dong Forn) of the district of Sanburi. Operations have now expanded to 30 villages of 11 subdistricts in 5 districts, i.e., Muang, Sanburi, Hanka and Wat Singha in the province of Chaimat, and the district of Nong Kayang in the province of Uthai-Thani.

Since the major occupation of the farmers is rice farming, TRRM directed its first efforts at improving productivity in this area. New methods, including better soil preparation and weeding, use of better seed, fertilizer, and insecticides, were introduced. In 1973, 306 farmers had adopted these new methods of rice cultivation in addition to those that already had been adopted in previous years.

In places where rice farming is unsuitable, farmers are encouraged to shift production to mung beans, soya beans, maize, watermelons, sesame, and animal husbandry.

In the field of education, TRRM first concentrated on promoting literacy by providing classes for children and adults. In 1973 TRRM received support from the government Adult Education Department to open classes in three places in Dong Korn and Prak Sriraja. There were 13 male students, 54 female students, and 8 teachers.

The TRRM maintained its activities in Adult Education (Grades 7 to 10) in five centres as before, but because of increased interest there were more requests for the establishment of this type of school in the province. Additional vocational-type instruction has been given in mushroom cultivation, fruit-tree growing, bookkeeping, and sewing. A total of 433 young women have received instruction in sewing and needlework.

With regard to public health, the medical team has rendered valuable service through its visits to examine and treat villagers and schoolchildren. Much progress has also been achieved in helping the village to install wells, proper toilets, and drainage systems, and in the acceptance of birth control techniques.

In the area of group activities, 12 credit unions have been set up with shares totalling almost Baht 251,434 ($12,571) with 503 chartered members.

In 1973 there were 11 Buying Clubs established with 333 members, principally for making group purchases of fertilizers, insecticide, and seeds, with Baht 24,708 ($1235) in shares. Goods bought amounted to Baht 315,900 ($15,795) with a net profit of Baht 12,823 ($641). One particular achievement of group activities is the reduction and total elimination in 1973 of buffalo thefts as a result of setting up Home Guards.