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Research Impact

Research for the Development of Provincial Education Planning

Dr. Pote Sapianchai
Secretary-General, National Education Commission
Bangkok, Thailand

Case Study conducted by Greg Armstrong, June - July, 1997

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Provincial Education Planning

Project Leader: Dr. Pote Sapianchai
Secretary-General, The National Education Commission
Bangkok, Thailand

Budget: \$48,400

Period: 1982-1985

1. Background

Decentralization of education first emerged as a serious policy proposal in Thailand in 1976, with a World Bank project on decentralization of nonformal education. Despite these earlier experiments with decentralization, however, by 1981, when the proposal for this project was made, educational planning was still very centralized, with Bangkok-based officials doing the planning, and provincial officials expected to implement the plans.

The proposal was written with the intention of linking the National Education Commission (the organization responsible for education policy development) with the National Primary Education Commission (responsible for delivery of primary education), in order to experiment with mechanisms for educational planning at the provincial level. The project's objectives included:

- a) analyzing existing systems for devising provincial educational plans,
- b) developing a data-base in each province for planning at the provincial level,
- c) devising new mechanisms for efficient, integrated planning for all departments of the Ministry at the provincial level, and
- d) selecting the best practice from these mechanisms for implementation in a subsequent World Bank project.

The ultimate purpose of the research was to integrate planning among the different departments of the Ministry of Education, at the provincial level. As one participant said:

"What we wanted to do was to change the starting point for planning, to take it away from the central level, where planning has always begun in Thailand, and to make it a bottom-up process which started with better local data to support the planning process."

The project was originally to have involved the National Education Commission, the National Primary Education Commission, and provincial education committees, by using seminars and

workshops to explore alternative methods of data collection. A team of eight researchers planned to conduct the study, essentially a pilot study for later implementation, in four provinces, one each from each of the four major geographic regions of Thailand.

2. Methodology of the Case Study

This impact assessment began with a review of project documents, including: a) The project proposal, "Research for the Development of Provincial Educational Planning (1981), b) the Project Summary, c) progress reports (August 1983, August 1984, d) comments on the project by project officer Anne Bernard, e) trip reports by project officer Dean Nielson (February and November, 1994), e) the final report (May 1985) and f) an IDRC-funded report titled "Social Sector Decentralization: The Case of Thailand, written by Dr. Boonlert Leoprapi (1996). The final document was used for a separate project but looked at the history of education and health decentralization policies. Documentary review was followed by interviews with ten Thai officials involved either in the management of the project, or in subsequent decentralization activities. All interviews were conducted in either Thai or English.

3. Project Context

Responsibility for administration of education at the time of this project was divided among three Ministries - the Ministry of Education which handled secondary education, religious education, vocational education and teacher education, the Ministry of the Interior, under which the National Primary Education was located, and which handled primary schooling, and the Ministry of University Affairs.

Thailand was, and pending implementation of its new constitution, currently is, a very centralized state. Budgets have traditionally been controlled by the central government. Provincial governors are appointed by and responsible to the Minister of the Interior, and provincial officers of all government departments (the primary administrative agencies of Ministries) are appointed by and responsible to the Directors-General of respective departments in Bangkok. The roughly 130 Directors-General of Departments are sometimes referred to as the "governing class of Thailand," because of their control of programme, staffing and administrative budgets.

In the years leading up to this project proposal, the Ministry of Education, with many departments operating in the provinces, found that each department collected its own data for

planning, and each department made plans which often conflicted with or duplicated the operational plans of other departments. At the provincial level, provincial officers from different departments of the Ministry of Education would communicate, but at the central level, little communication took place. Similarly, there was little communication between Primary Education Commission planners in the Ministry of the Interior, and their counterparts in secondary or vocational education in the Ministry of Education, both at the provincial and central levels.

This project was originally intended to link a staff agency (the National Education Commission, located in the Office of the Prime Minister, responsible for policy studies) with a line agency (the National Primary Education Commission in the Ministry of the Interior) to test out alternative models for integrated decentralized planning.

Decentralization was not a new idea at the time of this project. The fourth Five-Year Plan (1977-81) had, as one its objectives, decentralizing growth from Bangkok to the provinces. Decentralization of education was viewed as one way of achieving this. This project was, in fact, the second of four major projects focusing in one way or another on decentralization of Thai education, beginning in 1976 with the Nonformal Education Development Project, funded by the World Bank, followed by the IDRC project, in 1983-1985, by another World Bank project focusing on decentralized management training (1985-89) and including both a UNDP project currently under way on basic and occupational education, and a project to be funded by the Thai government, commencing in October, 1997.

ONE critical issue for this case study, therefore, was to determine whether the potential impacts of the IDRC project could be disaggregated from the cumulative impact of three other projects also dealing in substantive ways, with decentralization of education. This would be difficult enough in any project, even one which was primarily technical, if there were three other projects dealing with the same issue. In an area as vague and unpredictable as planning behaviours, and decentralization, it was particularly difficult.

4. Project Description

a) Strategies

The project included the appointment of five teams of researchers. Each of the four provinces selected in the regions for the research, had a team of eight researchers, consisting of four from the National Education Commission and four from the Ministry of Education. One additional team of four researchers

from the National Education Commission, supervised and coordinated the four regional studies.

The study consisted of data collection on existing practices of educational planning by diverse departments at the provincial level, through a questionnaire and field surveys, workshops to analyze the data collected in the regional case studies, seminars with senior officials of the Ministry, including the Minister (Chuan Leekpai) to discuss the need for decentralized and integrated provincial educational planning, and subsequent training workshops with provincial educational committees (representatives of education departments at the provincial level) and with provincial education working groups (representatives of educational institutions, such as principals of schools and teachers' colleges). The purpose of the training workshops was to try four different approaches to the collection of data and to teach people at the provincial level how to assess needs and collect data relevant for planning.

b) Inputs

While IDRC provided the money for the training and travel, the Ministry of Education provided substantial in-kind resources. Among the most important inputs in the project was the participation of the Minister of Education (and subsequently Prime Minister) Chuan Leekpai. It appears, from some of the comments made by those involved in the research, that the Minister's participation in a national seminar organized under this project, on the subject of decentralization, validated civil servants' interest in the process of decentralization.

Research was conducted jointly by the NEC staff and by staff of the Planning Division of the Ministry of Education, and training was provided by these staff. In each of the four test provinces, approximately 12-15 staff from different departments and divisions of the MOE participated in training.

c) Decisions

One of the most significant changes in inputs was the decision by the National Primary Education Commission NOT to participate in the project. The Commission obtained funding for its own project on decentralized planning, and withdrew from the project with the NEC. The National Education Commission, a staff agency, needed a partner with line responsibilities to implement the project, and the Planning Division of the Ministry of Education agreed to replace the National Primary Education Commission in this role.

This was a significant change, and it broadened the scope of the project from a concern with primary education planning, to a concern with planning in a number of educational sectors. The concern of one IDRC project officer involved in the project was that this change, by moving the NEC away from collaboration with primary education officials, and broadening the scope, would weaken chances for practical impact.

"Frankly, I'm worried about the experimental phase. NEC does not have much leverage among the executing agencies of the various ministries involved in provincial planning. The anticipated special link-up with the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) did not work out....Apparently NEC is determined to run its own experiment....However, I doubt if the project will ever be more than on the periphery."

The project was managed by a joint steering committee chaired by the Secretary-General of the NEC and by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education. All reports of project administration indicate that collaboration was, in fact, effective.

d) Process

Data collection on the existing planning system found that most education departments in the provinces conducted their planning without reference to other departments in the same province, and reported directly to their department headquarters in Bangkok. The results of this, not surprisingly, were that there was little or no coordination between planning at the primary and secondary levels, or between secondary and vocational, or between both of those and the labour market demands. The study found also that the role of the Provincial Education Officer, nominally responsible for coordination of education activities at the provincial level, was at best ambiguous, because the officer lacked authority over departmental representatives at the provincial level.

The researchers organized a seminar with high ranking education officials, including the Minister, Permanent Secretary and Directors-General of all Departments, as well as Division Directors, within the Ministry of Education, to review the findings and recommendations of the case studies. The case study researchers recommended training in education planning for officials at the provincial and district levels, the establishment of a Management Information System at the provincial level, and alternative planning models. The seminar recommended increased freedom of provincial officials to allocate resources for planning. It also reviewed alternative models for

organizing educational planning and coordination at the provincial level, and recommended one model for field testing. The model selected focused training not just on members of the formal provincial development committee, or its education subcommittee, but on officials at the district level, and officers from educational institutions. It also called for an integrated management information system linking all levels of government and all educational institutions, involved in defining needs, and collecting data for support of planning.

The IDRC regional programme officer responsible for the project at the time had doubts about the relevance of research to the field testing of the planning models.

"I had a difficult time seeing how the previous 24 months of research fit into all of this. I was assured that the research findings were reported in order to help in the setting up of the models. Also, through their participation in the research, provincial officers had become acquainted with the problems and issues related to various planning approaches. Nevertheless, the connection between the research and actual model building still seems tenuous to me, always, in my opinion, one of the main structural problems of this project."

The project then tested the proposed model, focusing on training for the education subcommittees, with three different training groups in the Provincial Development Committees in the four test provinces, training, in the process, about eighty officials. The project recommended that the Working Group (administrators of specific educational institutions) should receive more training, but found that some other education officials in the provinces were opposed to involving line administrators in planning. Those officials at the provincial level provided few guidelines for planning activities by the working groups. The fact that few of the members of the working groups had any experience or training in planning, was cited in the final report, as a weakness in the planning system. The final report of the project nevertheless called for increased training of these officials, and recommended training of officials in all of the other (nonparticipating) provinces in the country.

5. Project Analysis

5.1 Outcomes

a) Institutional capacity outcomes

While there was no clear outcome of the project on immediate issues of decentralization and integration (see discussion below of impact) the project did lead, indirectly, to increased capacity for planning. The planning model and training processes used in training education staff in the four test provinces in the study were later used in the subsequent World Bank project, to train staff at the same level in all remaining provinces (67 more). According to Ministry of Education staff, the fact that the training model was adopted for use in these provinces points to the utility of the project, and the perception of education officials from the Minister and Permanent Secretary to Directors-General, that, at the very least, the kind of training on data collection proposed by the IDRC project would be useful within existing planning paradigms. That is, the concept of decentralization itself, perhaps even of integration, was not necessarily adopted by government officials, BUT the idea that existing planning could be made more effective by giving the officials closest to the ground more skills in data collection, was seen to be useful enough to proceed with the training recommended during the project throughout the country, in the post-project period.

Databases were established at the provincial level for aggregation of data, in the aftermath of this project, but as other projects had also recommended this, it is difficult to determine whether this project alone was responsible for this, or for the subsequent establishment of a management information system linking the provinces to Bangkok.

In the end, the data collected by provincial officials after the post-project replication of training conducted in the IDRC project, and the establishment of the provincial data-bases, provided better data to planning officials in Bangkok, but clearly did not result in immediate decentralization or integration of planning at the provincial level. One official in the Department of Nonformal Education noted an apparently unplanned negative outcome of the project was the partial disruption of its coordination with other Ministries. The DNFE, because it works in areas related to agriculture, health and employment, had developed a sophisticated network of policy contacts with these Ministries, which received less attention when the Department was required to increase liaison with other Ministry of Education Departments.

What is clear, however, is that several years later, when another Thai government required immediate action by all education agencies at the provincial level to achieve measurable increases in progression rates from primary to secondary education, the training developed in this project, and applied nation-wide, was utilized to good effect. The current Director-General of the Department of Nonformal Education, described the utilization:

Q: In terms of the training programmes on planning, did they have any effect?

A: Yes. That is one good thing from the project. It was a field trial for training, and later this was spread to other provinces, and I remember that the training was quite good.

Q: Did they apply the results of the training to their work?

A: Not immediately. You see, this was just training, which was good, but there was no real demand for their skills, after they developed them. You know how the Thai bureaucracy is. It is hard to get change. Everything moves slowly and there is a lot of inertia. So, after the training, while they had new skills, most of the data they collected, even if it was better than before, was not used for anything which would change, in policy at the central level. But, later we had another project, which was aimed at improving the progression rates to secondary school, and we had a direct order, to see that progression rates improved. Then we had something concrete to aim at - real programmes with real outputs.

The IDRC project had used hypothetical issues for training on planning. But for progression rates, well, it was not really a project funded by the outside, it was a decision of the Thai government, a policy which had to be implemented, and implemented quickly. All departments in the Ministry had to cooperate closely, to develop integrated plans, which would have a result, which could be measured and evaluated. Then the IDRC project had a result, where it didn't before, because we could react very quickly, because the training had already been done, and they had the core staff in every province who knew how to collect data. The Minister's demand that we react on the progression rates forced people to make real use of the mechanism which was originally established in the IDRC project.

The implication of this is that there were institutional capacity outcomes from this project, albeit indirectly, traced through the web of other projects, all of which kept the concept of decentralization, and of integration, alive, even if not yet operational.

Having said all of this, it is important to note that there was an unplanned positive outcome of this research. The fact that the National Primary Education Commission dropped out of the project, and was replaced by the Planning Division of the Permanent Secretary's Office, removed the project from direct involvement with a line agency, as the IDRC regional project officer feared, but at the same time forged important links with the new partner. Prior to this project, there had been very little collaboration between the National Education Commission and the Ministry of Education. The NEC was seen as a rather academic policy institute, removed from the realities of day-to-day planning. As the current Director of Planning at the Physical Education Department observes:

" We worked together very well. In fact, the IDRC project was the first time the Central Planning Division had worked with the NEC. Before that they just stayed by themselves, and wrote policy papers, and gave them to the Minister. Sometimes they would talk to us, but not often....Sometimes we had to [listen to them] because the Minister might listen to them, and he would tell us to do something the NEC suggested. But, usually we did not have to worry about them. They did their work and we did our work. We did the planning and other divisions or departments in the MOE did the operations. The NEC would do research and studies, and have seminars. They did not interfere with us."

But this project, according to most reports, gave the NEC officers an appreciation of the problems faced by Ministry planners, and improved collaboration between the two agencies for at least a decade.

A senior NEC official now says:

"It helped me understand how the Ministry of Education works. Before that, I just worked on policy in the NEC, but during this project I worked very closely with the staff of the Ministry of Education and got to know them personally and professionally, and I still know many of them now. I don't think I would have known them, if I did not have this opportunity to work with them. Many of the people I worked with were promoted later to higher positions, so now I know a lot of senior people in the Ministry of Education. It helps my work a lot, because they will listen to me when I talk about policy, and I listen to them when they talk to me about their operational problems."

b) Individual capacity outcomes

The most obvious outcome of the project, and one which may have long-term impact both on individuals and on the education system (although this cannot yet be demonstrated) is the effect collaboration of the project had on the careers of the individuals involved, and on the career opportunities subsequently available to NEC staff, and staff of the Ministry of Education. This is the natural corollary of the earlier observation that institutional capacity for collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the NEC increased as a direct result of this project.

There is general agreement among those interviewed that prior to this project, there was very little, perhaps no career mobility between the NEC and the Ministry of Education. But this project, as the first major example of collaboration between the two, involved joint planning activities at the highest institutional levels (the Secretary-General of the NEC and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry), joint research at the national level, and joint training at the provincial level. While the project encountered the usual quota of operational problems, there has been no report of friction between NEC officials and officials of the MOE. In fact, all of the people interviewed for this report indicated that collaboration substantially improved mutual respect. The result of increased familiarity and respect was new opportunities for NEC staff to work in the Ministry, and for MOE staff to work at the NEC. The current Secretary-General of the NEC, someone who is not optimistic about decentralization, or about research, worked at the National Primary Education Commission when this project started. The current Deputy Undersecretary of Education, was a former NEC official. There clearly is no longer a perception among the staff in either agency that careers in the two are mutually exclusive.

On a broader level, approximately 120 individuals were trained during the pilot phase of the training, in four provinces. While many more were later trained in the post-project activities, one report suggests that the individuals involved in the research and training of the IDRC project were the most strongly affected by the emphasis on the benefits of decentralization, and are now the strongest advocates of decentralization. Whether this translates into new individual capacity remains to be seen. Only more detailed research, including interviews with the individuals trained, could reveal the ultimate impact of the training on their own lives.

c) Knowledge outcomes

It is clear that this project was one in a string of projects which produced, cumulatively, increased knowledge of the arguments for, the mechanisms for achieving, and the results of decentralization of education. This project, by itself, probably contributed moderately to knowledge about decentralization among senior officials (the Minister, Permanent Secretary, Directors-General and Division directors) although there is no objective measure of these probable increases in knowledge. There is much more certain information (this based on statements of the downstream efficacy of training) that the project resulted in increased knowledge about needs assessment, data collection and planning techniques by education officials in 71 provinces, and that this knowledge was subsequently utilized in practice.

d) Practice and product outcomes

Computers were purchased for the provinces participating in this project. In the post-project period, as part of the move to establish databases, and to link them in a broader Management Information System, they were purchased for all of the provinces. It is difficult to disaggregate the effects of this project, which recommended such practices, from other projects which followed, and which also advocated them.

Practice outcomes, however, are clearer. By all accounts these included changes in needs assessment procedures at the provincial level. These changes occurred several years after the project, but were described as attributable to the project. It is possible that as decentralization proceeds through constitutional change, further practice outcomes will be seen in the next five years, related to this project.

5.2 Reach

This project had its most visible reach to the 36 researchers-trainers in four provinces and in Bangkok, who participated in data collection and training. During the project period, the training also reached approximately 60 education officials working for the provincial education committee, in the four target provinces and perhaps 60 more who were members of the education working groups. If reach can be characterized in terms of intensity of exposure, obviously these are the high-intensity target group of the project.

At the same time, it is clear that senior government officials were exposed to the ideas of the project, in a less intense fashion particularly through the policy seminar held

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during the project. These included the Minister, Permanent Secretary and Directors-General of departments.

A directly attributable post-project reach was extended to between 700 - 900 education officials who were trained in the techniques developed during this project, in an additional 67 provinces, in a project funded by the World Bank.

In summary, the project reached 36 officials in high-intensity research and training, approximately 120 officials as recipients of primary training, approximately 700 - 900 officials in post-project training, and approximately 30 officials at the political or senior policy level, on essentially nontechnical, political issues. A casual aggregation of these figures would indicate that at a minimum roughly 900 officials were directly affected, to varying degrees by this project. An undetermined number have probably been affected by increased career mobility options arising as a secondary effect of the project collaboration between the NEC and the MOE, and as a result of improved planning skills.

It is worth noting that the primary trainers for the post-project World Bank project training, were the people trained during the IDRC project. It is also worth noting that the recipients of the primary training in the four test provinces became subsequently, according to interview data, the most ardent supporters of the decentralization which is just now beginning to take shape in Thai education.

5.3 Impact

a) Political or sector impact

If the ultimate intention of this project was to establish the capacity for decentralized planning of education in Thailand, it would be difficult to say that this project alone achieved this objective. The project was one of four major projects stretching from 1976 - 1997, which focused on decentralization. The system today is just beginning to be decentralized, and is just at the early stages of providing effective integration of educational planning among educational agencies in the provinces, so obviously the IDRC project did not have an immediate impact on decentralization.

One participant in the research said:

"Integration is still not very effective, but that is not just a problem with [the IDRC] project. We have a very complicated system, and there is a lot of resistance to

integration between departments for any kind of work - for planning, for implementation or for evaluation. But, after this project, I think I can say that planning was marginally more integrated. It did contribute to thinking about the necessity of integration, and this thinking takes a long time to develop....this project was a link in a series of projects which have all led to greater decentralization. It was not a question of the project by itself leading directly to decentralized planning, but it was that it kept the issue of decentralization alive, and sustained it, and moved it marginally forward, until other projects could pick it up and carry it further."

Another official concurred:

"There is not much impact on integration. It is about 15 years since we started the IDRC project, maybe 12 years since it finished, and if you go to the provincial level now, you still see how each department, 14 departments from the Ministry of Education, works by itself, without talking to the people from the other Departments. No, that is not true. They talk to them, but they do not really plan together, to integrate their work....Because they still get the money from Bangkok, from their own boss in the Department - the Director-General - and they have to answer to him. The policies are still set by Bangkok for each Department, not from the provincial level, because the money is in Bangkok."

It is interesting to note that Chuan Leekpai, Minister at the time of the project, was Prime Minister ten years later when a bill promoting decentralization was introduced in the House of Representatives. The Chuan Government's policy statement at that time said:

"If it is not possible...to transfer authority to educational institutes,...the Ministry of Education will decentralize....to the provincial Education Committee, district education committees or other units under the Ministry of Education." [Boonlert, 1996]

The bill died when the House was dissolved for elections.

The IDRC project, ten years earlier, in the seminar then-Minister of Education Chuan attended, recommended increased authority to the provincial education working groups (composed of heads of educational institutions), and to the provincial Education Committees. It is not possible to attribute the Prime Minister's subsequent interest in general political decentralization directly to the IDRC project, but it is possible to hypothesize that the project did nothing to discourage his inclinations to decentralize and probably played a part in reinforcing Chuan's Democratic Party's commitment to decentralization, which has manifested itself most recently in the 16th Constitution's strong emphasis on decentralization of authority to the provinces and districts.

There is some irony in the observation by one Director-General in the Ministry, that real decentralization is now coming about as a result not of specific policies by the Ministry, which have usually met with little success, but by a combination of budget cuts forced by the recent economic crisis, and by constitutional changes giving more control over local resources to district councils. The result has been that local councils now contribute funds to Ministry of Education programmes at the provincial and district level, in exchange for participation in decisions on programme curricula and hiring of staff, and in programme evaluation. In at least some of these councils, are former officials of the Ministry of Education, some of whom were trained in planning.

The fact that the training model developed in this project was subsequently used nation-wide to train up to 900 provincial and district officials on planning, and that these officials were later called upon to engage in planning in response to a call from the Minister for quick action at the provincial level to increase progression rates from primary to secondary education, and that there was an increase in those rates, indicates that there MAY have been an impact ultimately on a large number of people. It was not possible to gather sufficient data during the period of the study to confirm this, however.

b) Institutional capacity impact

It appears that one indirect impact of the project may have been a diminution in interest in pure research by the National Education Commission, albeit a decade later. A tenuous link can be drawn between the increased career mobility evidently generated by this project, and the appointment of the former director of the National Primary Education Commission (Ministry of the Interior) to become the current Secretary-General of the National Education Commission.

This individual who at the time of the IDRC project was the director of the NPEC, decided that the NPEC would NOT participate in the project with the NEC. He now, as head of the NEC, says that the NEC is no longer interested in research as such, but only in policy analysis. If the NEC has withdrawn from research to focus on more immediate links between policy analysis and the planning requirements of the Ministry of Education, it is in part due to this individual's role at the NEC, which was facilitated by the IDRC project's outcomes, increasing career mobility. Similarly, the IDRC project resulted in a new understanding between NEC and MOE officials of the need for the NEC's activities to be more directly linked to operational concerns, and twelve years later, this has been reflected in the Secretary-General's decision that the agency should no longer do pure research.

Whether this impact is positive or negative, depends on whether the reader views research or policy analysis as more likely to have impact on education practice.

I think that although it has been more than a decade since this project ended, some of its institutional capacity impacts will manifest themselves within the next decade. Decentralization of education planning is now proceeding, in part because of broader constitutional decentralization, and because control of resources at the local level in a time of national budget cutbacks forces attention to local needs. As the new Constitution is implemented, as local councils take more control over programme funding, there will be a requirement for technical skills in planning at the provincial, district, and as the IDRC project recommended, at institutional levels. This has already begun, in southern Thailand, where Muslim communities are demanding, and getting, more input to the planning process at the school level.

c) Individual impact

If the impact of a project is the difference it makes, from the perspective of those who use, benefit or are disadvantaged by the project, then the only individual impact which can be determined at this stage, given the limitations of data collection, were on the careers of officials in the NEC, and in the Ministry of Education. Several of these people said that the broadened scope for lateral career movement affected their careers positively. More detailed data collection might be able to determine if, as a result of increased progression rates from primary to secondary levels, facilitated through the IDRC project training, there has been an indirect impact on other individuals.

6. Enhancement of Outcomes, Reach and Impacts

Although one IDRC regional programme officer worried about whether the project was focusing on applied policy analysis and training rather than pure research, it appears that it was precisely this focus which led to the perception of positive outcomes and impacts by participants. Where the project was weakest was where it was removed from immediate needs of the officials it served. As the Director-General of the Nonformal Education Department said, the immediate impact of nation-wide training based on the IDRC training models was minor, because the planning tasks assigned to train the planners were regarded as being a mere training exercise. Integrated planning was required, but, as the DG said, it was "kanom chan" planning - in the pattern of a layered Thai dessert, one plan placed on top of another, each one discrete, packaged together, but not integrated. But, when a real and immediate Ministerial directive required fast and integrated planning, on a task of vital professional interest to the participants, the IDRC training then training paid off.

This is not surprising. All research on the implementation of educational innovations makes it clear that innovation, experimentation and training must be relevant to the interests of the ultimate users (usually field workers, teachers or planners) if the innovations are to be effective. The fact that the NEC, which had been essentially a staff agency, isolated from the day-to-day realities of educational administration, planning and programme delivery, by its location in the Prime Minister's Office, joined with the planning division of the Ministry of Education, and worked on practical issues with MOE staff in the field, apparently gave NEC staff a new appreciation of the value of policy research tied closely to operational requirements. At the same time that collaboration gave senior Ministry officials an appreciation of the potential value of the NEC's work, if it could be related to operational implementation issues. The Secretary-General of the NEC at the time the project was initiated said clearly that this was one of his motivations in searching for an organizational partner in the MOE:

"In fact, at first I thought of a project for the NEC only, to recommend policy on decentralized planning, but then we realized that this could not work effectively, because the other group, the MOE, was doing the work of planning, so we would have to work with them, work together....We formed a joint steering committee for the project with the Ministry of Education to manage the project....Because I wanted them to take ownership for the idea, to use the idea,

and I knew that if they were not involved, they would not accept the results, or use them effectively."

One senior MOE official said that if any improvements could have been made to the project, it would have been to locate the project within the MOE, and thus closer to administrative realities, rather than in the NEC.

In the long run, this experience, and the subsequent opportunities for educational administrators to work in the NEC, has apparently led the NEC to the conclusion that its work had to be focused less on pure research, and more on policy analysis, or practice-related policy research. In the long run, this may be the most profound and enduring result of the IDRC project, and one which will itself, have substantial indirect impact through new policy activities undertaken by the NEC, in collaboration with MOE officials.

Improvements to the project, from the perspective of the participants would have included more time for training and reflection, and more concentration on training at the institutional level. This, at least, is the perception now, ten years after project completion, and is coloured, no doubt, by the recognition that a decade of trying to impose decentralization from the top, may have been a contradiction in terms; that real decentralization is demand-driven, from the bottom. As decentralization now takes hold, driven in fact by local communities' demands for control over resources, it is the officials at the institutional level, who are faced with the requirement for planning skills.

7. Feedback on the Case Study Process

This project was completed roughly ten years ago. This had both positive and negative implications for the case study on impact.

On the negative side, most of the participants were initially unable to recall the details of the project. The researcher handled this by bringing the appropriate project documents to the interviews, and reading through them with the interviewees.

On the positive side, the fact that this project was completed long ago, provided a chance to look at how it fit into broader, long-term political and institutional change processes related to decentralization. Had the project been assessed (as was the Cambodian project on health care) a year after completion, it would have been impossible to determine what, if any impact, it had. Decentralization is a very complex process,

and it can only be assessed over a long period of time. This also permitted the assessment to look at how the project had affected long-term institutional relations between the participating partners, and to look at the effect on individuals.

The study was facilitated by the fact that the researcher was able to conduct interviews in both Thai and English.

The study would have been more effective had more time been available. The real impact issue is whether there were any changes at the field level, on delivery of education. This could only be assessed by further interviews in the provinces, and the location and analysis of documents related to progression rates.

The fact is that the real, long-term impact of this project may just now be on the cusp of being revealed. In the next two years, decentralization of education delivery is likely to become a reality. While it will never be possible to disaggregate completely the effects of this project from others, when looking at decentralization, it might be possible, with further analysis, to determine the effects of the project on planning at the local level.

8. Summary of Outcomes/Impacts

a) Institutional capacity

Outcomes:

Model for provincial planning training (input to World Bank project)

Increased capacity for provincial planning (post-project)

Increased collaboration between NEC and MOE

Increased career mobility between NEC and MOE

Impact:

Change of focus from research to policy analysis within NEC (post-project)

Potential impact on decentralization (yet to be realized)

b) Individual

Outcomes:

60 core staff with training experience

Approximately 800-900 staff trained in planning

Impact:

Career mobility for specific individuals

c) Knowledge outcomes

Knowledge of data collection, needs assessment, planning techniques at provincial level (input to subsequent projects)

d) Practice and product outcomes

Computers purchased for test provinces

Education Database created in test provinces

MIS system established

e) Sector impact

Potential impact on progression rates

f) Reach

36 core trainers researchers affected

120 provincial staff trained during project

Approximately 20 senior policy officials (Minister, DG's) familiarized with decentralized planning requirements

700-900 provincial staff trained post-project

ANNEX

1. Documents Reviewed

Proposal: Research for the Development of Provincial Educational Planning, Educational Research Division, National Education Commission, Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand. 1981.

Project Summary, IDRC. March 25, 1982. 3-P-81-0241.

Progress Report, Educational Research Division, NEC, August 1983.

Letter from Anne K. Bernard, Project Officer to Dr. Chinnapat Bhumirat, November 14, 1983.

IDRC Trip Report by Dean Nielsen, Feb. 27, 1984.

Progress Report, Educational Research Division. NEC, August 1984.

IDRC Trip Report, Dean Nielsen, November 1984.

Final Report. Dr. Chinnapat Bhumirat, NEC. May 1985.

Social Sector Decentralization: The Case of Thailand. Dr. Boonlert Leoprapai, Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University. IDRC: October 24, 1996. Electronic copy.

2. Dates of Field Research; Persons Interviewed

Bangkok: June 6 - 13; September 5, 1997

Dr. Chinnapat Bhumirat, former project research officer
Currently Director of Information Technology section,
National Education Commission
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (662) 668-7123, ext. 1217

Dr. Rung Kaewdaeng, Secretary-General
National Education Commission
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (662) 243--7911; Fax: 243-1198

Dr. Kamol Sudprasert, Advisor Standing Committee on Education, House of
Representatives
Consultant, Human Development Project, MOE
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (662) 578-1129
(Funded by UNDP - decentralization followup project)

Dr. Prapatpong Senarith
Director, Planning Division,
Physical Education Department
(Worked on the NEC project on decentralization, originated the UNDP project)
Tel/Fax: (662) 214-1338

Dr. Phanom Pongbaibool,
Deputy Undersecretary, MOE
(former Secretary-General, National Education Commission)
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (662) 243-0083

Dr. Pote Sapianchai
Former Secretary-General, NEC
Bangkok University,
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (662) 671-7349, ext. 612

Dr. Kasama Voravarn
Director-General, Department of Nonformal Education
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (662) 282-9718

Dr. Vichai Tunsiri, M.P.
(Former Secretary-General, NEC)
House of Representatives,
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (661) 914-5225

Joint Interview:

Sunthorn Sunanchai, consultant, Human Resource Development Project
(Former Director, Department of Adult Education)
Ministry of Education
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (662) 281-3441; 811-9644; 628-5640

Marut Jatiket,
Director, World Education, Asia
Bangkok, Thailand // Tel: (662) 279-1381
E-mail: WEASIA@mozart.inet.co.th

2. Documents Reviewed

Proposal: Research for the Development of Provincial Educational Planning, Educational Research Division, National Education Commission, Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand. 1981.

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3. Dates of Field Research

Bangkok: June 6 - 13; September 5, 1997

4. Interviews

Provincial Educational Planning

Dr. Chinnapat Bhumirat, former project research officer
Currently Director of Information Technology section,
National Education Commission
Bangkok, Thailand.
Tel: (662) 668-7123, ext. 1217

Dr. Rung Kaewdaeng, Secretary-General
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House of Representatives,
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Joint Interview:

Sunthorn Sunanchai, consultant, Human Resource Development Project
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Ministry of Education
Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: (662) 281-3441; (661) 811-9644
628-5640

Marut Jatiket,
Director, World Education, Asia
Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: (662) 279-1381
E-mail: WEASIA@mozart.inet.co.th

Interviews (Conducted in Thai and English, Paraphrased, unless
indicated otherwise)

Note: These are **excerpts** from interviews.

1. Dr. Chinnapat Bhumirat, former project research officer
Currently Director of Information Technology section,
National Education Commission
Bangkok, Thailand.
Tel: (662) 668-7123, ext. 1217

Background:

Ph.D., worked as a research officer on the project. Now director of the IT programme at the NEC. Had difficulty recalling the project, until I read relevant sections of the reports he wrote, back to him.

Q: What was the innovation in this project? What was new?

A: Actually the establishment of the Working Groups was not an innovation of this project. The innovation was really to attempt to strengthen collaborative mechanisms for planning overall. To strengthen the processes of collaboration.

What we wanted to do was to change the starting point for planning, to take it away from the central level, where planning has always begun in Thailand, and to make it a bottom-up process which started with better local data to support the planning process.

Q: A data-base was supposed to be created in each province where the new procedure was tried. Was this done?

A: Yes, data-bases were established in the test provinces, because bottom-up planning requires accurate data.

-After the project, the central government provided more support to local level planning everywhere. More equipment, such as computers, were provided to local offices. This project had an impact on the government, which decided to use computers to establish the data bases. It was important also, that computers were just being introduced in Thailand in government at the time of this project, so when we concluded that databases should be established, the government accepted this and used computers as the basis for the data bases. It would otherwise just have been paper files used as the data base.

Q: Did the project actually improve integration of planning between different levels?

A: Marginally. Integration is still not very effective, but that is not just a problem with our project. We have a very complicated system, and there is a lot of resistance to integration between departments for any kind of work - for planning, for implementation

or for evaluation. But, after this project, I think I can say that planning was marginally more integrated. It did contribute to thinking about the necessity of integration, and this thinking takes a long time to develop.

-One thing this project did achieve, was to lead to another project, funded by the World Bank, which Dr. Kamol Sudprasert was working on, which was aimed at increasing the capacity of all people involved in educational planning. So, this project was a link in a series of projects which have all led to greater decentralization. It was not a question of the project by itself leading directly to decentralized planning, but it was that it kept the issue of decentralization alive, and sustained it, and moved it marginally forward, until other projects could pick it up and carry it further,

Q: What was the biggest obstacle to achievement of decentralized planning?

A: Control of resources. The project recommended that there should be a lump-sum payment made to local planning agencies, which they could control themselves, to collect the data they think necessary for good local planning. But the government never responded to that, because they want to control the resources. The World Bank project also recommended that control of some funds be shifted to the provincial and local levels, for planning.

Q: Who was the primary partner of the NEC in the implementation of this project?

A: It was supposed to be, originally, the Office of the National Primary Education Commission - Dr. Rung, but they got their own money for a separate project on similar topics, and they did not want to participate in this one. So, it became the Department of Education Planning of the Ministry of Education. "But that was good, because this was an operational partner, a group of people who had to work on educational planning all the time, not just on policy like the NEC does."

Q: What was the major output of the project?

A: The major output was increased collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the National Education Commission.

Q: So, you mean that it was a side-effect?

A: Yes, because we did not know that would happen. We had to collaborate to do the project, but whether the project led to more decentralization is something we could not say for sure, because there were a lot of other things going on. But we can say for sure that this project led directly to closer work, even after the project, between the NEC and the Ministry of Education. Before

that, we did not trust each other. In the NEC we thought they were not interested in policy, and the MOE thought the NEC did not understand the reality of their work. So, in this project, was the first time the two agencies worked together, hand in hand. After the project ended, we had the World Bank project "Planning and Management in Education" located in the MOE, and we worked with them on that one too. Only now, in the UNDP project, are we losing some of the collaboration, because there is no formal role in it for the NEC.

Q: What would you do differently if you could do this project again?

A: "It would have been better to transfer resources directly to the local level, and then see if they could do the planning better. That would be a better test of decentralization. The problem was that there was never any transfer of money to the local authorities....I would want to test the capacity of the local authorities, some with money, and some without, to undertake planning and needs assessment."

Q: Chuan Leekpai (at the time Minister of Education, subsequently leader of the Democratic Party, Prime Minister and currently Leader of the Opposition) attended one of the workshops you had for the project, when he was Minister. What effect did that have?

A: "His participation was important, because it showed to the people in the Ministry that he supported decentralization. It also showed the Ministry that he supported the collaboration with the National Education Commission. "

Q: The Democrats were later in favour of decentralization when Chuan was Prime Minister. Is there any link here?

A: It is hard to say, but "I think this project reinforced Chuan's interests in decentralization, and therefore reinforced his commitment later when he was Prime Minister. But it would not have been the major factor, I think."

Q: Overall, how would you assess the impact of this project on decentralization of planning?

A: The project has a moderate influence on the decentralization debate, in general, but a significant influence on the discussions of decentralization in education. In particular, it made people think again about the concept that the state, the central government in Bangkok, should provide all the money, all the expertise to the local level, and make all the decisions for them. Also, as I said, it kept the idea of decentralization alive.

Q: What the NEC research agenda affected by the project?

A: Definitely. We had two subsequent projects which focused on decentralization, including the World Bank project, and a project funded by the UK which also focused on planning at local levels. This project, the IDRC project was the NEC's first significant project on decentralization, and it kept a lot of people interested in the subject.

Q: Did the project make any difference to you, personally?

A: Yes It helped me understand how the Ministry of Education works. Before that, I just worked on policy in the NEC, but during this project I worked very closely with staff of the Ministry of Education and got to know them personally and professionally, and I still know many of them now. I don't think I would have known them, if I did not have this opportunity to work with them. Many of the people I worked with were promoted later to higher positions, so now I know a lot of senior people in the Ministry of Education. It helps my work a lot, because they will listen to me when I talk about policy, and I listen to them when they talk to me about their operational problems.

Interview # 2

Dr. Kamol Sudprasert, Advisor Standing Committee on Education,
House of Representatives
Consultant, Human Development Project, MOE
Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: (662) 578-1129
(Funded by UNDP - decentralization followup project)

Background: Advisor to the UNDP funded project on Basic and Occupational Education and Training. Involved as advisor to the IDRC project. PhD.

Q: What does the current UNDP project focus on?

A: It is an attempt to encourage students to continue their studies to grade 9, primarily through trying to decentralize decision-making about education to the local people. The project works in 13 provinces: Lampang, Khampaeng Pet, Udorn, Ubol, Buriram, Rayong, Lopburi, Samut Sakhorn, Ratburi, Krabi, Songkhla, Nakhon Sri Thammarat and Pattani.

Q: What is the target group, in terms of decentralization?

A: The Provincial Committee on Education, Religion and Culture.

Q: In the earlier IDRC-funded project, one of the target groups which developed during the project, not the immediate, planned target group, was the Working Group at the provincial level. Are they involved in your project too?

A: Sometimes. But it depends on the group. The Working Groups are drawn from different departments at the provincial level, from different schools, for example, and whether we work with them, depends on the group. In some provinces they are good, and in other ones not so good. We provide training to the Working Groups - like principals of schools, for example - on how to gather data, and do planning, and we give them more resources to work with.

Q: Are these government resources?

A: No, these are resources from the UNDP. The Ministries do not give the Working Groups more authority.

Q: Is there any continuity, any intellectual link between the early project of IDRC, on decentralization, and this one?

A: Well, the IDRC project was not the first one. The World Bank had a project on decentralization of nonformal education in the late 1970's, then came the IDRC project with the NEC, and then the

World Bank project, and now the UNDP project. The World Bank project ran from 1985-1989. We did review the earlier projects, in fact, and this gave us the idea for working further in this area. Also, because of these earlier projects, there is more interest in decentralization, and more people are willing to work on it. You can see, for example, that we have more provinces in this project -13, than were involved in the IDRC project.

Q: So, have these projects - a series of 4 projects, in fact, if we go back to the World Bank DNFE project - have they made any difference in terms of achieving decentralization of education or integration of the work of the departments at the provincial level?

A: There is not much impact on integration. It is about 15 years since we started the IDRC project, maybe 12 years since it finished, and if you go to the provincial level now, you still see how each department, 14 departments from the Ministry of Education, works by itself, without talking to the people from the other Departments. No, that is not true. They talk to them, but they do not really plan together, to integrate their work.

Q: Why not?

A: Because they still get the money from Bangkok, from their own boss in the Department - the Director General - and they have to answer to him. The policies are still set by Bangkok for each Department, not from the provincial level, because the money is in Bangkok.

Q: What about decentralization, in general?

A: No, ONPEC, for example, is still very centralized. There is almost no local decision-making in primary education.

Q: So, what motivated the UNDP project?

A: The UNDP decided to give the money for this project, because, in 1993, the Democratic Party was in power, Prime Minister Chuan, and they were drafting legislation, for the decentralization of education. The UNDP wanted to support this, by providing training to local officials, so that when decentralization came, they would be able to do the work better. But then, the House of Representatives was dissolved, and the bill died, and when the new government came in, they were not interested in this.

Q: The IDRC project included a recommendation for the establishment of data bases at the provincial level, for education planners. Have you done any work on this?

A: In fact we have an M.I.S. component in this project, but it is for Bangkok. It is not shared at the provincial level. The

provincial level has to feed information to the central level, but it is not a sophisticated system for the provincial planners.

Q: So, how can you strengthen provincial educational planning?

A: We think we need reform of the staffing system. People need incentives for their career to stay in the province. Right now, if you want to be promoted, you have to go to Bangkok, because that is where the higher jobs are, and where the resources are. We need to transfer more resources to the local level, so good people will be content to stay and work there.

Interview 3 - Joint interview

Sunthorn Sunanchai, consultant, Human Resource Development Project
(Former Director, Department of Adult Education)
Ministry of Education
Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: (662) 281-3441; (661) 811-9644
628-5640

Marut Jatiket,
Director, World Education, Asia
Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: (662) 279-1381
E-mail: WEASIA@mozart.inet.co.th

Background: Sunthorn was Director of the Adult Education Division of the Ministry of Education, during the first decentralization project, funded by the World Bank (1976-81) and worked in the Department of Nonformal Education when the IDRC project began. Marut is the Director of World Education's Asian programmes. World Education has been working with the Thai Ministry of Education continuously since 1976.

Q: Has decentralization progressed much, from the time of the World Bank project on decentralization of Nonformal Education, in 1976?

A: Sunthorn: It has, but not in all departments. I think it has progressed the most in the DNFE. The Regional and Provincial offices now work in all parts of the country, and they do good work.

Q: Were you familiar with the IDRC - NEC project?

A: Sunthorn: I heard about it, because they wanted to work with the staff of all of the departments in the test provinces.

Q: Did it have any impact?

A: Sunthorn: A bit. It did not change anything by itself, because there were no resources from the government to follow up. But it made people in other departments, outside of the DNFE, think about decentralization and coordination of their work.

Q: Did it have any long-term impact?

A: Marut: It is difficult to say if individual projects had any direct impact. All of these projects on decentralization work on basically the same thing, but you can see that Thailand is still very centralized. The problem is that the government has not followed through on the policy. There was the Prem government, and the Chatichai government, and Suchinda, and Chuan, and then Banharn

and now Chavalit, since the IDRC project. Each one of them has their own agenda, and their own reason for wanting or not wanting decentralization. The problem is that if decentralization is successful for education, people will want it for other things too, and some of the governments did not want general decentralization.

Q: It looks like you are getting more general decentralization, or at least deconcentration now, with the creation of the Provincial Administrative Organizations, and the upgraded status for the Tambol Councils.

A: Marut: That is true. And this may help decentralization of education too. If the resources are really transferred to the provincial level, then we will see decentralization of education, because the local people will want to protect their own resources. So that is why we keep working on these projects, like the IDRC project, the World Bank planning project, the UNDP project - so that people will have the skills, and the attitudes to make their work more effective, if the politicians can make the decision for decentralization.

Interview 4:

Dr. Prapatpong Senarith
Director, Planning Division,
Physical Education Department
(Worked on the NEC project on decentralization, originated the UNDP
project)
Tel/Fax: (662) 214-1338

Background: PhD. Worked on the staff of the Central Planning division of the Ministry of Education, when the IDRC project was implemented. Currently works both as director of the Planning Division, of the Department of Physical Education, and as general policy advisor to the Deputy Minister of Education.

Q: Which of the decentralization projects did you work on?

A: I worked on the IDRC project. I was in the Central Planning Division, and my division coordinated closely with the NEC on that project. I also worked on the World Bank project, on Planning and Management Improvement, which came after the IDRC project.

Q: What was your experience like in working in collaboration with the NEC?

A: We worked together very well. In fact, the IDRC project was the first time the Central Planning Division had worked with the NEC. Before that they just stayed by themselves, and wrote policy papers, and gave them to the Minister. Sometimes they would talk to us, but not often.

Q: Did the Ministry listen to the NEC, in those days?

A: Sometimes. Sometimes we had to, because the Minister might listen to them, and he would tell us to do something the NEC suggested. But, usually we did not have to worry about them. They did their work and we did our work. We did the planning, and other divisions or Departments in the MOE did the operations. The NEC would do research and studies, and have seminars. They did not interfere with us.

Q: Was the IDRC project different?

A: "Of course. We worked together with them, to define the objectives, and to operate it and to evaluate it. It was a more realistic project than the work the NEC did before."

Q: What do you think were the most important results of the IDRC project?

A: We developed training modules which people used after the project, in all of the provinces. We used them first in the pilot

provinces, but then these modules were used to train people in all of the provinces - 71 of them at that time, I think. We asked them to use the training packages as the basis for analyzing special development problems in education in their own provinces.

Q: So, how many people were trained using these modules?

A: I don't know exactly, but usually it was 12-15 people per province - the people from each Department in each province, so probably more than 800.

Q: What other results were there?

A: A MIS system was established after the project. In part this was because of the recommendation of the project that data bases be established in the provinces. We distributed computers to the provinces.

Q: Did these systems have any impact?

A: Some. It was easier for the provinces to organize data.

Q: Did you use the data they sent you, or did they use it for their own planning?

A: They did not do much planning then, in the sense of the project's intention, but informally, they did use the data, for discussions with other departments at the provincial level. They also sent the data to us, and it was easier for us to use the data, because it was better organized, and came from the local level, so it helped our planning too.

The major output of the project, however, was just that the attitudes to decentralization were changed.

Q: Where - everywhere?

A: No, in the provinces the 4 or 5 provinces which were used as the pilot provinces. In those provinces, you could go back years later and find the people who participated, and they were strong supporters of decentralized planning.

The other thing, was that the Working Groups in those provinces were strengthened. Those people liked the process, and became more effective.

Q: Was there any large-scale impact?

A: Well, we trained a lot of people after the project. But if you mean, was there any decentralization in a large scale after the project, the answer is no. That was a political decision.

Q: If you could design the same project again, what would you do differently, to improve impact?

A: I would have located the project not in the NEC, but in the MOE. It should have been closer to the people who were doing the work in education. Also, I would take more time. The project was too fast, and there was not enough time for people to think about what we were doing, to learn about it more deeply

Q: Did the project affect people's careers?

A: Well, a lot of the people who worked on the IDRC project are still in education, and they work together quite effectively. So, that was not planned, but I think it was useful. It is easier for planners to talk to the policy researchers, after the project.

Q: Did the IDRC project have any overall effect on the train of projects or the pattern of thinking about decentralization?

A: Some. Twenty years ago, there were only a few people who were interested in giving power to the local level for planning or evaluation of education. Now that is part of the ordinary discussion every day. Sometimes we are not too effective, but people in all of the Departments of the Ministry talk about it, and it is the Minister's policy, and it has been the policy of several Ministers, to do this, even if we have not implemented it effectively. But at least, it is accepted as the policy. Now, with the latest projects - including one funded by our own government, for the vocational institutes, we are trying to encourage the local school to be self-sufficient, to have their own evaluation system, their own database on labour conditions and requirements, so they will know how to plan their own programmes, will know what to ask the central government for, too.

Q: Is this a direct effect of the IDRC project?

A: No. The idea of decentralization did not come directly from the IDRC project. But the IDRC project was one in the early days, which led to others, which have all helped this idea to go forward.

Q: Did this project have any effect on your career personally?

A: "I was young and wanted to learn and try out new ideas about democratization of human resource development. My personal background was that I came from the Northeast, from Mahasarakam province, which is very poor, and I knew that many of the things in the schools there were not relevant to our needs in the Northeast. So, I wanted to work on something which would help us get local knowledge in the curriculum, to meet local needs. This project was a good opportunity for me. And I met a lot of people then, who have worked with me since then too. So, I think it was good for my career."

Interview 5

Dr. Phanom Pongbaibool,
Deputy Undersecretary, MOE
(former Secretary-General, National Education Commission)
Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: (662) 243-0083

Background: Ph.D. Deputy-Secretary-General of the NEC while the project was being carried out. Later SG. Currently Deputy UnderSecretary MOE. Had no recollection of the project, until the documents were reviewed with him, then began to recall the nature of the project.

Q: Did the IDRC project affect the way decentralization was approached?

A: I don't know if it was the IDRC project, or just all of the projects together. But now, decentralization of the management of education is quite an important topic, quite high in priority in the Ministry.

Q: So, the cumulation of all of the projects is what has caused more interest in decentralization?

A: Yes. We have more than 15 years of experience now with experimenting with decentralization, so people are now convinced that it is useful.

Q: How does this interest in decentralization manifest itself? What kinds of behaviour do you see now in the MOE which indicate that there is decentralization/

A: People now participate more in decision making.

Q: Which people? The officials at the provincial level?

A: Yes. But also the people in the villages. Now they participate in the decision-making of the Provincial Education Committees, and in the past, they did not do that. In the past, it was just the officials - the provincial education officer, the department representatives, sometimes the district officers, and the tambol officials. But now the people talk to the members of the committee, about what they want, their ideas about education in their province. Their are school committees now. The school committees look at how the budget is spent, how the teachers work.

Q: What budget are they looking at?

A: The budget which comes from Bangkok, to the province, to the local school. But now also with the new Tambol decentralization,

they are looking at how money is spent, which is administered by the tambol. Also the people are looking at the curriculum in the schools.

Q: Which provinces have the most public participation?

A: The South, of course, because the Muslim community is very interested in the curriculum, to ensure that their religion, or their values are included in the school.

Q: There have been several unsuccessful attempts, most notably the law drafted by the Chuan administration, to decentralize. Do you think this government will pass such a law?

A: "Laws cannot force people to participate at the local level". The law of the Chuan administration died when the government lost the vote. We cannot wait for the laws. We just do it.

Q: You decentralize without the law?

A: Yes, of course, because we can just make decisions to give more authority to the local level. We know this is better, because the decisions will be better, and we do not have to worry about them at the central level, too much.

Q: Was your career affected by this project?

A: Well, I could not remember the project, until we talked about it, you know. But I moved to the MOE, from the NEC, and that was good for me, so I suppose it was easier for our staff to move and work with the MOE, because we collaborated with them.

Interview 6

Dr. Pote Sapianchai
Former Secretary-General, NEC
Bangkok University,
Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: (662) 671-7349, ext. 612

Background: Ph.D. Secretary-General of the NEC at the time of the Project, later president of the national education university, currently professor at the private Bangkok University.

Q: What was the motivation for starting this project?

A: I was a member of the Education Reform Commission, and it recommended to Cabinet that there should be decentralization of education, to solve the bottlenecks in planning and administration in education. So, I thought we should try it first, a pilot, to see how we could work on decentralized planning. That is why I recommended this project to IDRC.

Q: So, why did you decide on a joint project, rather than just a project by the NEC?

A: In fact, at first I thought of a project for the NEC only, to recommend policy on decentralized planning, but then we realized that this could not work effectively, because the other group, the MOE was doing the work of planning, so we would have to work with them, work together.

Q: How was the project actually organized? How far did the joint management go?

A: It was quite extensive. We formed a joint steering committee for the project with the Ministry of Education to manage the project.

Q: Why did you do this?

A: Because I wanted them to take ownership for the idea, to use the idea, and I knew that if they were not involved, they would not accept the results, or use them effectively. So, I was co-chairman of the project with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, so you had the two top officials, and the others in our organizations had to participate too.

Q: What were the outputs of the joint group/

A: We decided we needed to strengthen the capacity for data collection at the local level. This was something we had thought about at the NEC, but when we got the ideas of the planning

officials too, we saw that they recognized that this was a weakness in the system for them too. They could do a lot of work on planning, but what were they using for data? Just some ideas they had in Bangkok, because the people at the provincial level, or even at the district level did not really have the appropriate skills for gathering data relevant for planning purposes. Anyway, a lot of those officials had other work to do, work which the MOE gave them as a priority, higher than gathering data.

Q: Did this change as a result of the project?

A: Not immediately, but after a while, as we repeated the activities, it changed. This was not because of the NEC, but because we were working with their superiors at the MOE, and when the MOE Undersecretary and Deputy Undersecretary and then later the Directors General said: "We want you to do more effective work on planning" then this became a priority for them too at the provincial level. Well, it was not really a priority, in first place, but it was more important than it was before. And this meant that the provincial officials could legitimately spend their time on it - or some more of their time than they spent before.

Q: Did this project have any effects outside of the original test provinces?

A: Oh yes, definitely. We started with inservice training on educational planning at the amphur level, and the provincial level, in the four provinces. But after that, after we tried this out, then we learned the good things, and what the mistakes were, and we decided to do the same thing in all provinces.

Q: So, how many people were affected by this training?

A: I don't know now, but in each province we trained the people.

Q: So, there were 71 provinces then, right?

A: Yes, I think that was the time for 71 provinces, and we trained about 14 or 20 people in each province.

Q: So, about 1,000 people were probably trained in these techniques?

A: Yes, that is approximately right.

Q: Was the participation of Chuan Leekpai, when he was Minister of Education, of any significance?

A: He did not participate actively, but he did attend one of the big seminars, and that was quite significant, because it meant that the Minister himself was endorsing the idea of decentralization, and of the priority to give to decentralized planning. So, I think

while he did not follow this closely, because he had a lot of other things to do, that he did legitimize the project, because the others could see that the people at the top took it seriously.

Q: Do you think the management of education in Thailand, or the quality of education, changed much as a result of the project?

A: No. Not immediately. This is a long process, you know. The result was that teachers at the school level, became aware of a number of issues, about how important it was to keep accurate records, and they saw that the Ministry was interested in their participation in planning, not just in teaching. This project helped to mobilize them, to participate and become involved.

Q: Aside from the direct effects on education, did this project affect the careers of the people who participated?

A: Oh yes. That is clear. Many NEC staff later went to work for the MOE. Dr. Rung, for example, and Dr. Panom, who rose quite high. That had not happened before, and I think it was because of the cooperation on this project, that people were able to move like that.

Q: If you had the opportunity to design the project again, what would you do differently, to make it more effective?

A: This project really started at the top, with the top people. If I did this again, now, I would train more people at the local level. What we did, was to train them to collect data, but the policy was still made at the top. Now, I would want to work with the people at the provincial and amphur level, to develop policy from the bottom up, not just data collection.

Interview 7

Dr. Kasama Voravarn
Director-General, Department of Nonformal Education
Ministry of Education
Tel: (662) 282-9718

Background: Ph.D, at the time of the project worked as assistant director of a DNFE division involved with decentralized planning. Also participated in a previous World Bank project on decentralization of nonformal education.

Q: How important was the NEC project?

A: It was OK, but in terms of what affected us directly, I think the poverty eradication project, initiated by Prime Minister Prem, between 1981-83 was more important. Also, if you want to find a good project to evaluate, it was one of Anne's I think - the microplanning project, had a very big impact on everybody. Why don't you evaluate that one?

Q: Because I wouldn't get paid for it. What was the difference between the NEC project and the poverty eradication project?

A: The poverty eradication project required all departments, of all ministries working in a province to work together. It was important because it was not just formal cooperation at the central level. We had to produce results in the province, and we were going to be held accountable for the results, so we had to cooperate.

Q: Did it work? Were you able to coordinate with the other departments?

A: Yes, and that is interesting. The NEC project was an attempt to encourage coordination between the two education agencies, and inside the MOE, between departments. But we found with the poverty project, it was actually easier for us to coordinate our work with, say, the Ministry of Health projects at the provincial level, than it was to coordinate with other departments in the Ministry of Education. The purpose of the NEC IDRC project was to establish committees at the provincial level, to coordinate work within the Ministry, between the departments. But the DNFE had been working on integrated projects at the regional level and provincial level, for about 5 years, at least, before the IDRC project, and we already had good working relations with departments in the Ministries of Agriculture, and Health, and Interior.

Q: So, what effect did this IDRC project have?

A: It took time away from our work with departments in other Ministries. We had a finite amount of time, and if we were going

to have meetings with the Department of General Education, or Physical Education, or something, then we could not have meetings with the departments in other Ministries.

Q: In terms of the training programmes on planning, did they have any effect?

A: Yes. That is one good thing from the project. It was a field trial for training, and later this was spread to other provinces, and I remember that the training was quite good.

Q: Did they apply the results of the training to their work?

A: Not immediately. You see, this was just training, which was good, but there was no real demand for their skills, after they developed them. You know how the Thai bureaucracy is. It is hard to get change. Everything moves slowly and there is a lot of inertia. So, after the training, while they had new skills, most of the data they collected, even if it was better than before, was not used for anything which would change, in policy at the central level. But, later we had another project, which was aimed at improving the progression rates to secondary school, and we had a direct order, to see that progression rates improved. Then we had something concrete to aim at - real programmes with real outputs. The IDRC project had used hypothetical issues for training on planning. But for progression rates, well, it was not really a project funded by the outside, it was a decision of the Thai government, a policy which had to be implemented, and implemented quickly. All departments in the Ministry had to cooperate closely, to develop integrated plans, which would have a result, which could be measured and evaluated. Then the IDRC project had a result, where it didn't before, because we could react very quickly, because the training had already been done, and they had the core staff in every province who knew how to collect data. The Minister's demand that we react on the progression rates forced people to make real use of the mechanism which was originally established in the IDRC project.

Q: How could the IDRC project have been structured, to have had more impact immediately, rather than having to wait for the impact?

A: If it had focused more quickly on one issue, something which was of urgent policy importance, it would have worked. But we were asked to develop integrated provincial plans, which were, you know - the Thai desert - "kanom chan" the many layers? Well, the plans were like that - one plan by one department, placed on top of another plan by another department, and on top of another one and another one, but no real integration at all. It was artificial integration, too academic, so we called it "kanom chan planning". But that changed when we had a real issue to deal with.

Q: Is the education system more decentralized now than it was then?

A: Not officially. We tried to decentralize authority for curriculum development to schools, but without providing supporting resources, and what happened? The standards for university entrance, which were set centrally, did not change, but the local curricula did, and the parents were very upset, because they were worried that the students, their children would not be able to pass the university entrance exams. Therefore, we learned that you cannot decentralize only one element of the education system in isolation from the others. You have to change the university entrance system too, and educate parents to participate in decisions about curricula, and at the same time give the teachers more resources.

Q: Why?

A: Because although we allowed the teachers to develop new curricula, we did not give them the money to do so, and so only a few did, and they spent all of their own time, and a lot of their own money to do so.

Q: So how are you going to achieve decentralization - or are you?

A: In fact, it is now occurring because of decentralization of the wider political system combined with budget cuts. We have had very severe budget cuts, and we cannot fund all of our adult education programmes that we want. But the tambol organizations have been given money - you know how they were created?

Q: Yes, there was a bill which gave them legal status if they met certain requirements.

A: Yes, and so now they have more money which the local tambol council can spend. So, we have cutbacks and they have money, so we have to make a case for our programmes, and sell them to the tambol councils, and that means, that the programmes have to be locally relevant, with locally developed curricula, because a tambol in Udorn is not going to take the same programme that a tambol in Songkhla will want. When the government in Bangkok has less power, and less money, it has to listen to the local authorities, who have the money.

Q; So, what do they do with the money?

A: For example, they hire staff to work on our programmes. They interview the staff, and they set the criteria for hiring, based on local issues, and they hire the people who can teach the courses they want at the local level. It helps us a lot, but it also makes the programme more relevant to the local level. Some of the people who are on these councils are former DNFE employees, so they know what they are doing, and some of them have had experience in planning too, as a result of this project and others.

Q: If the new constitution is passed, will it make education more decentralized too?

A: Certainly, because the new constitution will decentralize political power even more, which means more decision at the local level, and more decisions about education. And that is what we wanted to do for a long time, through all of these projects.

Meeting with Rung Kaewdang (cf CV in file)
Secretary-General, NEC
June 13/97

- Rung remembered nothing of the project, this despite his having been Deputy Secretary-General of ONPEC at the time and having (1982-5) his own similar project: Strengthening Capacity of Provincial Primary Education under WB funding. Like the NEC project, this focused on training of staff of the provincial offices, but in this case, only the Primary Offices.

- He had no sense of the NEC project facilitating collaboration among education depts at the provincial level. The MoE's coordinating body at the provincial level is the Committee on Education and Culture, chaired by the governor with the Provincial Education Office as Secretariat and reporting to the Permanent Secretary of the MoE. It is relatively weak: little budget, no appointment-making capacity and poor training. All power at the provincial level is in those Depts which have schools (eg the Provincial Primary Education Cttee -- and therefore money, appointment power, training -- and these do not collaborate with the CEC.

- In his view, the NEC project did not facilitate collaboration between the MoE and NEC. It has been the case since Dr Kaw's time when he held appointments at both. It also happens becs the NEC is the natural intermediary among the 9 ministries with an education function but which do not talk directly with each other. All go through the NEC as do all their submissions to Cabinet.

- He was serving as advisor to Chuan Leekpai during project period, and does not remember the seminar in which he endorsed its provincial planning goal.

- He recommended we try to meet Ms Mantana who was at the time Director of Education Planning and so would have known abt the project. She is now Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Teachers Commission.

- EIMS: still has not developed; MoE recognized as having poor data management.

- Provincial Education Planning: still almost non-existent. The different departments each develop their projects (primary, secondary, voc ed, phys ed etc), put them in a single document and send them to the MoE for approval with no attempt to integrate or relate them. The CEC is too weak to do such, with budget to meet only 2-3 times/year, and the Office of Permanent Secretary hasn't got the leadership strength to enforce it.

- feels research has little real impact on policy or programmes; it takes too long, is generally not done in policy-relevant terms and results sit on shelves. For this reason, NEC has dropped research as such, concentrating instead on strengthening its capacities in policy development, planning and evaluation. These are activities which have impact and which generate money (from government and donors). Any research done through NEC is contracted out to consultants (eg Pote and Saisuree) and universities, but still has to have a "clear policy channel or we don't do it".