

KHET PHATHANAKANE

HISTORY OF HOUEI KONG CLUSTER September 1963 to 1 April 1965

Kong Se Nam Noi started as a cluster early in September 1963. Prior to this time a Civic Action Program had been conducted by MAAG, under which program a Cooperative was established as well as a dispensary. The two activities were continued by USAID after the departure of MAAG, US AID employed two TCN's to supervise the program. With this background, American presence is not new in the area, but the concentrated, stepped up activities of a cluster program and Americans in residence in the area are.

Kong Se Nam Noi is situated on the Bolovens Plateau. The thirty-five villages and population of 4,200 are composed of Lao Theung. The principal tribes are Loven and Nhyaheun. These villagers quite largely have a subsistence type of economy and very little produce is exported. The area is served by one merchant located at Ban Houei Kong, the Kong headquarters. (The word "Kong" is Lao Theung and is synonymous with "Muong"). The Kong is an area approximately 50 kilometers north and south and approximately 40 kms. east and west, with Ban Houei Kong located on the western edge and in the northern portion of the area. The area has two principal rivers that drain to the Se Kong on the eastern edge of the plateau through the Se Nam Noi River. Water generally is plentiful but undeveloped. Villages are located near streams but not close enough for the streams to provide a good water supply. Small quantities of water are carried for drinking and cooking, but bathing and washing are done at the streams.

Officials and technicians from Vientiane visited the Kong the latter part of August 1963 and at that time a brief feasibility survey was made. Following the establishment of two IVS volunteers in the area on September 5, 1963, an intensive social and economic survey of the area was conducted. This survey became the basis for the activities outlined below.

We should note that Ban Houei Kong is reached by a very poor, dry weather trail from Paksong. However, because of security, Americans do not travel the trail but instead commute via STOL aircraft and helicopter. About 50 percent of the supplies for the cluster move via the trail by commercial hauler, the other 50 percent by airlift. Commercial trucking was halted in June 1964 when our trucker's truck was blown up by a land mine. Since then we have had a small amount of supplies trucked in by the local Houei Kong merchant. He cannot haul materials that are obviously US AID's and this factor has caused some difficulty.

ACTIVITIES

Most of the activities are of a continuing nature: The one exception is roads and bridges, but in the fields of health, education, and agriculture must be on-going and continued indefinitely.

1. Roads and bridges

Eleven bridges and six culverts were programmed for the cluster, with roads being somewhat incidental to the bridge construction. The road from Houei Kong to Ban Taot has been extended to Latsassine which is 11 kilometers from Ban Taot. The entire road and bridge program has been fraught with problems -- primarily the lack of good equipment. Public Works Branch obtained an HD6 tractor dozer from T.P. which due to its vintage has broken down many times. Despite equipment difficulties good progress was made and four bridges have been constructed. All bridges are constructed with local unsawn timber except for the plank runners which were shipped in from Pakse. The largest bridge which traverses the Houei Mak Chan at Ban Taot is set on timber piling. The bridge at Houei Kong is an "A" frame type set on mud sills. A similar type of construction was employed on the other bridges for the southern portion (Phase I) of the project and will be employed on much of the northern portion (Phase II). However the Ban Nam Tham bridge (1 kilometer North of Houei Kong) will be set on concrete piers due to its length and the rocky stream bed.

The road and bridge activity was originally planned to be accomplished with volunteer labor. Six hundred and fifty man-days were contributed but attendance was irregular, often-times there would be too many laborers for the work program whereas on many days only a few men would appear. The volunteer labor program was replaced by the establishment of a "Trainee Program" which provides for the payment of a small per diem to the trainees to help sustain them while they are absent from their villages which in many instances are 10 to 15 kilometers distant from the project site. The trainees are given on-the-job training and a two hour formal class is held each Monday and Thursday morning. Although the men do considerable coolie labor they all have the opportunity to learn the principles of log type bridge construction, the care of heavy equipment and the use of tools.

This activity should be completed by the end of the next dry season.

2. Public Health and Dispensaries

This activity reaches more villagers than any of the others and is one that they "feel" directly. We have done very little to date in actual Public Health but have concentrated on getting our dispensaries built and in operation. Since last September four self-help dispensaries - Nam Ngo, Ban Houei Soi, Latsassine, and Nong Mek -- have been put into operation. In addition, we have the larger, central dispensary and "hospital" at Houei Kong. These dispensaries are staffed by thirteen local medics, ten of whom have had a minimum of six month's training at O.B. Paksong. A TCN, Mr. Antik, is the public health administrative assistant, he is the over-all manager and keeps the program organized, makes reports promptly, and maintains the inventory of medicines and supplies.

We feel that this activity offers many opportunities to contact people. We hope to expand Public Health work once our dispensary program is well established. We believe the dispensaries will also be a "hub" for gardens and similar activities.

3. Demonstration Area and Agriculture Improvement

The Nai Kong assigned one hectare of land near the stream at Houei Kong. FWD and IVS constructed a house for headquarters on the site. It was completed and occupied early in April 1964. This has become the center of our operations. The land was cleared with the tractor dozer and successive plantings of corn, soy beans, mung beans, and vegetables were made beginning in early May. The first crops did not do well, primarily due to being planted too late and because we did not have properly tilled fields. Two water wheels have been built and are used to supply water for our demonstration garden, water for the animals and will supplement daily requirements of the fish pond. Villagers have been invited to plant gardens in the demonstration area adjacent to the water line. A pig house and pens made of native materials have been built, and we obtained one gilt from O.B. and 3 yorkshires and 4 durocs from USAID/Vientiane which have attracted much attention and comment. A corn crib and duck house have been constructed in the "barn lot" area.

Vegetable seeds were distributed to 125 villages in May '64. Instructions were given on how to plant and care for the gardens. The program met with only meager success as instructions were not followed. Considerable seed was not planted but was used during the recent dry season. Interest remains high but villager follow-up is needed.

A principal part of the Agriculture Program has been the development of a rice paddy north and west of Ban Nong Mek by members of the Loven tribe (Houei Kong Tasseng). We had intended to expand the existing Nhyaheun paddy at Tong Why, but the Nhyaheun did not want the Loven to work with them. We purchased eight buffalo, plows, and miscellaneous tools in April 1964. Fifteen men from the Houei Kong vicinity set up a camp at the paddy and proceeded to till and plant under the direction of two low land Lao farmers we hired to give them instruction. As the rice on the Plateau is predominately raised in dry "hais"; this venture was entirely new for the villagers. They followed the Lao leaders very well and fourteen of the men out of the fifteen made paddies. The crop started to grow well, but a poor harvest resulted because the buffalo broke into the paddy several times and grazed down most of the paddies.

During the past two months villager participants and others have met to revitalize the project. At the beginning only 4 were interested in continuing but with proven interest in the paddy area by IVS/USAID the number of participants all but exceeds the original number. A jeepable road was cut 8 kilometers to the area, assistance given to stimulate "permanent" housing at the site and a participant developed schedule of activities, including adequate fencing, care of buffalos and paddy building have been formulated. Hopes are high for a good year ahead.

4. Water Development

An activity plan has been approved and field plans are being made to install two water wheels in the Se Katam River, one at Nong Mek and one at the Loven rice paddy. At Nong Mek the water will be used for domestic purposes and gardens, and a laundry rack will be poured. We are hopeful that we can encourage clearing up the village and using of the stock manure on gardens watered by the wheel. This project, coupled with the dispensary, should augment and good Public Health program in the village. The wheel at the rice paddy will be used primarily for irrigation paddies.

5. Education

The educational activity plan activated last August following an educational survey, aimed at establishing a Groupe Scolaire in the Kong and the building of 4 self-help rural schools. This program is an exception in that it is the only one in the cluster that directly involves an RIG Ministry - the Ministry of Education - and we are being careful to coordinate with USAID and RIG Education people in this undertaking in order that an on-going educational program can be carried out on the Plateau. Efforts to date have resulted in the approval for the construction of a new 6-room Groupe Scolaire in Ban Houei Kong (ready for use in September 1965). A director has been appointed in this school as well as several new teachers in the Kong, and a large amount of school supplies have been made available and distributed. We feel that good progress is being made in education in the Kong with excellent cooperation by the Primary Inspector, Attopen. The Director of the Groupe Scolaire is scheduled to participate in a training course for teachers in Thailand this summer. A local carpenter has constructed furniture for the school.

6. General

At this writing there are 3 IVS volunteers stationed at Houei Kong. They are very interested in their work and seem to have excellent relations with the villagers. They are conducting English classes and are showing motion pictures as extracurricular activities. Volunteers with an Agriculture background stationed in the cluster are always needed if we are going to use extension methods to carry information gained from our demonstration area to the villagers. As there are no fundamental educators or RIG personnel working in the cluster, the entire program, functionally, becomes the sole responsibility of IVS/US AID.

Progress in the cluster during the past year has been slow. This has been due to our own failures and that of villagers to accept the fact that they must produce labor-wise, if our combined efforts are to bring about improvement. At this point the villagers seem more willing and we also have a better understanding of them. These two factors should tend to enhance more rapid progress in the coming year.

Pakse
15 March 1965