

USAID/Houa Khong History

Economic and Military assistance to Houa Khong Province (then known as Nam Tha Province) began two years after the bilateral Economic and Military Assistant Agreement between the USG and the RLG had been signed in 1955. The period from 1957-1960 was generally characterized by military advisory assistance at Luang Nam Tha, the Provincial Capital. A very small effort of civic action community development programs was concentrated in Nam Tha itself with no assistance extending beyond that of Nam Tha Village. The multi ethnic population prior to 1960 was concentrated at Muong Sing, Nam Tha and areas located along the Nam Tha River. Ban Houei Sai had a population of less than 700 persons.

In 1960, the date signifying the beginning of the modern Laotian conflict which engulfed the entire country for 13 years, hostilities broke out between pro-communist elements (NLHX) or (LPF) and non-communist elements in areas along the Nam Tha River ultimately leading to the military take over of the Provincial capital, Luang Nam Than in February of 1962, by the NLHX forcing non-communist (loyalist) troops and American Special forces advisors (Col. Edwin Elder, MAAG) to flee to the Ban Houei Sai garrison and across the Mekong to Thailand.

With the signing of the Geneva Accords in July 1962, and the subsequent formation of a new Coalition Government, Houa Khang Province became divided with nearly 3/4 of the geographical area under NCHX administration and 1/4 under RLG control. Significant numbers of refugees from NLHX areas fled to the RLG areas and emergency relief was needed to care for the continuous, influx of refugees from the NLHX areas as the NLHX admin-

istration tightened their control and consolidated their power. From 1962-1964 USOM efforts were largely directed towards providing emergency relief to refugees with insignificant community development inputs or projects.

In 1964, *with* the collapse of the Coalition Government and a resumption of hostilities, on all fronts, the RLG offensive in Houa Khong Province recaptured considerable territory with nearly 3/4 of the Province under RLG control and 1/4 under communist control (except Nam Tha, Muong Sing). The 1964-1968 period with regard to planning was characterized by two significant trends; a realization that economic and development assistance had to be extended and increased to the hilltribe areas, (largely, isolated mountainous areas for political reasons) and a significant mobilization of conscriptable age males to defend the new perimeter. The result of the later altered radically the available labor force and had a great impact on economic production and family self-sufficiency. These two developments were realized by USAID/Laos and economic and development assistance was increased substantially. Community development and the construction of schools, the training of teachers, wells, small irrigation projects and dams were implemented to improve and counter-balance the man power shortage. Hostilities were largely insignificant during the 2 year period except in 1966 when a major offensive was launched and the communist forces captured areas from Ban Hou Kha to Tha Fa along Route 3. In 1968 the two towns were retaken by the RLG which pushed FAR troops into Luang Nan Tha for a 2 day occupation.

The inability of the RLG to hold Nam Tha and the subsequent withdrawal to positions surrounding Nam Tha precipitated the fleeing of thousands of persons from Nam Tha. This massive influx of an estimated 18,000 persons to the vicinity of Ban Nam You and along the Mekong particularly at Ban Dan once again directed AID to plan and implement programs of emergency refugee relief. Once settled in the Nam You and Mekong areas, programs of permanent community development were planned and implemented; permanent schools (wooden) drilled wells, dug wells, dispensaries markets, roads and some irrigation projects. considerable efforts to upgrade and develop the human resources was made; Naiban-Tosseng Trg; creation of Village Development Committees, Farmer trg, medics and nurses trg, and the CREC (Community Rural Education Centers) teacher training. The actual take off point for total development; that of human and natural resources began in 1968, and continued at increased levels, emphasizing the self-help concept until 1973, the year of the ceasefire.

Beginning in the fall of 1972, when communist elements began a general offensive to grab as much territory as possible before the ceasefire, AID operations were once again concerned with refugee relief operations as priority one. A steady influx of refugees, ultimately brought 21,000 new persons into those areas controlled by the RLG at the day of the ceasefire. Emphasis at this time, by USAID also centered around the US/PGNU anti-Narcotic's program which may have come at an unfortunate period given the political and military realities at the time.

attempted to formulate a multi-disciplined assistance program which would encompass all of the ethnic minorities at a "grass roots" level. Middle echelon civil servants, particularly Village leaders and village council representatives put to what I would consider excellent use the USAID resources which were channeled at that level. Unfortunately a leadership vacume existed at the top and no one, in a period of ten years was willing to make personnel changes which would rectify the problem.

The rationale of USG assistance to the area of Houa Khong Province during the period is probably best explained by:

1. Its geography--(Isolated border Area)
2. The Sizable Military Assistance Program
3. The War Generated Refugees
4. Anti Narcotics Efforts

Given the demographic make-up with over 15 major groups of ethnic minority hill tribes of the area (only 7% were ethnic Lao) the tremendous factionalization, lack of common leadership, National purpose, and the extremely meager communication/transportation/development resources at hand, any assistance program had formidable obstacles. Fielded USIAD personnel recognized these constraints and for the most part