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### **Study Abroad Research Context**

Researching the development of the Lahu and Palong tribes of rural Thailand provided an educational experience unlike any other. Our group of four students had to learn how to rely on a team to overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties, operate without oversight, and find ways to work effectively in a culture that was entirely unfamiliar to us. Most importantly, we learned how to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances around us. Our team prepared extensively before departing for Thailand. We received instruction on Thai language and social customs. In addition to this cultural preparation, we performed preliminary research, obtained the necessary equipment, and even made a group effort to put on some additional pounds (to soften the blow of illness from foreign bacteria and a drastically altered diet). We were convinced that regardless of the circumstances, we would be ready to tackle the problems facing the hill tribes of Doi Ang Khang. Ultimately, we succeeded, but it was not the books, the extended-battery-life laptops, or the collective 30 lbs our team managed to gain before our departure that helped us to make a difference.

When we arrived in Thailand we quickly learned an important lesson of the real world: things change. We had been promised a great array of previous reports around which we would be able to frame our project, but we soon discovered the content of these reports was limited to an exploration of apricot cultivation in Doi Ang Khang. The agreement that translators would be available for conducting interviews turned out to be a misunderstanding. For a moment, it seemed as though our project was evaporating into the tropical heat.

We quickly discovered that there would be no handholding. The expectation was that we would depart from the bustle of Bangkok for the remote mountains of northern Thailand alone and were to come back in a single month's time with results. As our Bangkok sponsor nonchalantly stated before our move north, "I'm sure you will find a way to be resourceful."

Once we were up north, we quickly found that if progress was to be made, it would be through our team's creativity and ability to forge our own path. Through casual discussions with people we met, we were able to make friends and identify new resources. We obtained vital background information at the Tribal Research Institute through a tip-off by a librarian we met at the Chiang Mai University Library, which was located hours away from Doi Ang Khang. We made friends with the staff at the Royal Project Station Ang Khang and were able to enlist the help of the few English speakers as translators for our interviews. Some of these friends, including a Royal Project youth development coordinator, an agricultural program specialist, and a public relations officer, also shed light upon the problems of the villages from their own unique perspectives. These people shared countless anecdotes of personal experience with the tribes and some vital bits of advice, such as, "Don't wander around at night because the border isn't well marked and you might be shot by Burmese soldiers."

These experiences helped us learn to depend upon one another as a team. We were able to rely on each other to find answers and the methods needed to uncover them, and we gained confidence in our cooperative ability to evaluate critically our ideas. Though we were four American university students with very limited Thai language skills living atop a remote mountain along the Thailand-Myanmar border, we found ourselves surprisingly comfortable with the demands of our project. Through the various twists and turns of our research project, our team's flexibility, creativity, and self-reliance allowed us to fuse Thai and Western cultures and find our way in Doi Ang Khang.

# Educational and Social Development in Doi Ang Khang: A Comparative Study of the Khob Dong and Nor Lae Villages

## **I n t r o d u c t i o n**

Northern Thailand is home to many hill tribes, who have lived for hundreds of years as subsistence farmers or nomadic hunters. The tribes migrated to Thailand over the past centuries for a variety of reasons. Hunter tribes were forced to transition to agriculture as game grew sparse and forests were gradually depleted. In the 1940s, communist insurgencies drove many hill tribes from China, Burma (now Myanmar), and other nations south into northern Thailand (Srisukho, 2005). Our study is concerned primarily with the Lahu and Palong tribes of Doi Ang Khang, which reside in the villages of Khob Dong and Nor Lae, respectively (also referred to as Bann Khob Dong and Bann Nor Lae).

Uprooted from their native lands, the hill tribes left behind ties to economic resources and, to compensate, many turned to the growth of the opium poppy as a cash crop. The growth and sale of opium endangered their lives and those of the citizens of the surrounding countries, and slash and burn farming methods resulted in environmental degradation. In 1969, the Thai government formed the Royal Projects to address this situation. The Projects sought to bring the hill tribes in the Chiang Mai province closer to the Thai standard of living by teaching the hill tribes new skills and techniques for cultivation of fruits and vegetables and for water conservation, shifting the hill tribe economy towards profitable agriculture and handicrafts and removing its dependency on opium as a source of income (Tassanee, 2004). Military intervention and the introduction of cash-crop agriculture terminated large-scale opium production, but the educational and social development of the hill tribes lagged behind (Tassanee, 2005).

The Royal Project Foundation then expanded its development efforts with the establishment of the Education and Social Development Projects (ESDPs) in 1982. The ESDPs seek to implement sustainable social services within the villages, and have been largely successful in hill tribe villages. However, the Lahu tribe of the Khob Dong village, in the Doi Ang Khang region of Northern Thailand, has not exhibited the level of improvement desired by the Royal Projects. Little research existed which assessed the ESDPs' success or failure in its development initiatives in Doi Ang Khang. Previous attempts to understand the shortcomings of ESDPs had not yielded actionable recommendations (Nuntavarn,

2004). The aim of our evaluation was to develop an understanding of why the Khob Dong village had not achieved a high level of success from the ESDPs and to recommend strategies for improving future development projects.

Our research assessed the current status of the ESDPs, the causes of the programs' successes or failures, and the needs of the villagers of Doi Ang Khang. We used a combination of archival research, observation, interviews, and qualitative analysis methods. It was necessary for us to develop a thorough understanding of the ESDPs, the Ang Khang Research station, and the hill tribe people to conduct our assessment and provide culturally acceptable recommendations. The success of our study depended on our ability to make inroads into the village communities and understand the social and political structures of the tribes.

### **Background: The Royal Projects**

The Royal Project covers the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Lamphun, and Mae Hong Son. Within this area there are 36 development centers, four of which have experimental agriculture stations. These development centers help 100,490 people from different tribes. The programs have had varying degrees of success in the tribal villages surrounding the Ang Khang Research Station. While some tribes, such as the Palong of the Nor Lae village, have accepted the programs wholeheartedly, others such as the Lahu of the Khob Dong village have been reluctant to embrace these projects.

The Royal Project Foundation's efforts in Doi Ang Khang include agricultural, educational and social development projects. The five main goals of Royal Project Foundation are:

- To improve the quality of life of hill tribes;
- To reduce the destruction of natural resources such as forests and water sources;
- To eliminate opium cultivation;
- To conduct land use zoning and encourage proper land use and soil conservation;
- To produce agricultural production to improve the economic condition of Thailand. (The Royal Project Foundation, N.D.)

The simple and straightforward guidelines for implementation state that the process must be quick and easy, stress self-reliance, and aim for success without anticipating recognition (The Royal Project Foundation, N.D.). The introduction of new agricultural techniques helped the hill tribes to eradicate opium cultivation and addiction, and to establish permanent settlements through the elimination of slash and burn farming. The Royal Project expanded its

programs for agricultural training to include educational and health programs to increase the quality of life for the hill tribes through Education and Social Development Programs (ESDPs).

The Education and Social Development Programs (ESDPs) specifically addressed education, youth development, healthcare and family planning, all with an emphasis on youth development. The ESDPs assist about 118,496 people in 22 districts, and are funded by public and private organizations as well as the Royal Project. (Tassanee, 2005). The following sections describe these different programs.

### **Education Projects**

The first educational program of the ESDP introduced a mobile library, sponsored by Chiang Mai University, in 1982. Volunteer librarians traveled between tribes with the library. After a five-year circuit, it was decided to establish permanent libraries at schools, and to train teachers to become librarians. The Khob Dong village, under the jurisdiction of the Ang Khang Research Station, was chosen to be the site of the first school in 1984. More recently, model schools have been established in the hill tribe communities. A model school for the Lahu tribe was started in 2002 at the Khob Dong School, which implemented farming programs for school lunch, environmental development, and cultural awareness. In addition to model schools, seminars for school strategy development were held in 2003 for teachers to share their experiences with teaching hill tribe students. Other programs have been developed, such as those designed specifically for developing leadership skills in young members of the communities (Tassanee, 2005).

The first permanent libraries were established in 1987, three years after the first school was built. The library creation initiative reached its height in 1996, when 50 libraries were established at 50 schools in celebration of His Majesty the King's 50 years of reign (Tassanee, 2005)

### **Youth Development Projects**

In 1987, youth camps promoting the development of quality of life in the tribal villages were first offered, with financial backing from World Vision (a Christian aid organization). Another program, the Youth Development Network, sponsored by UNICEF, debuted in 1999. This program trains youth to be leaders in their communities and offers income-generating programs. The Youth Development Network expanded in 2004 to include career development and sponsor youth activities. It offers up to 5000 Baht (about \$138) to each of fifteen development centers, allowing the youth to decide how they would like to spend the money in their community. The youth then raise 5000 Baht

themselves to contribute, through fundraisers such as selling garbage for recycling. The program has allowed communities to set up sports fields and cultural conservation events (Tassanee, 2005).

### **Health Projects**

Development of health care programs began with a mobile health clinic in 1984. Volunteers donate their time, travelling to a different village each month. Since 1986, when the volunteer group was established by Kasem Wattanachai (former president of Chiang Mai University), 97,000 patients have been treated by the mobile clinic. Many hill stations, including the Ang Khang Research Station, have gone on to establish permanent health centers, with help from the Ministry of Public Health (Tassanee, 2005), making free health care available to hill tribes. In addition, basic sanitation infrastructure improvements have been made in the villages: Khob Dong has two bathroom areas with three toilets each, while most houses in Nor Lae have a latrine outside.

### **Family Planning Projects**

The health services of the ESDP were expanded in 1997 to include family planning services. Organizations such as the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand and The Family Planning for Hill Tribe People Center joined the Royal Project's efforts. The program has been very successful in some areas, but the beliefs of some tribes reject any form of birth control. In addition to the distribution of birth control materials and HIV/AIDS screening, other prevention programs have been introduced within the past five years that teach young hill tribe girls about reproductive health, pap-smear screening, and breast cancer prevention (Tassanee, 2005).

## **Implementing the Royal Project Programs in Doi Ang Khang**

The Education and Social Development Programs have been initiated on a village by village basis. The project does not have a centralized plan for implementation, choosing instead to address each need as it arises. Therefore, each village is affected differently by the programs.

The methods of program implementation have a large influence on the success of the program. Programs are usually implemented in either of two ways: an integrated approach, involving the people at every step, or a militaristic approach in which force is used to keep illegal activity at bay, while implementers of the ESDPs work with the tribes to ensure the success of the program. The

term *integrated implementation* refers to all programs put into operation without the intervention of the military. The Royal Projects have used both of these methods in different areas: The successful project at Doi Tung used military force, while the mixed results of the Doi Ang Khang project were based on an integrated approach (Nuntavarn, 2005).

At Doi Ang Khang, researchers at the Royal Agricultural Station Ang Khang fields and gardens developed techniques for growing tropical and temperate fruits, and other assorted crops as appropriate substitutes for opium production in the cool climate there. They then taught the hill tribe farmers the techniques needed to successfully grow these crops (The Royal Agricultural Station., N.D.).

The program implementation in Doi Ang Khang were divided into three phases. The “Research, Experiment and Demonstration tasks” phase relates strictly to the experimentation required to grow indigenous and foreign fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs and trees in the area. The second phase, “Promoting and Training tasks,” entails all activities for teaching and supporting the farmers, staff, and others interested in growing highland crops. “Career Development and Extension tasks,” the third and final phase of implementation, teaches the importance of the projects to the hill tribe people. Our assessment focuses on this third phase of integrated implementation.

The ESDP has achieved unequal degrees of success with the integrated implementation approach in Bann Nor Lae and Bann Khob Dong, two villages located approximately 3 kilometers apart. To assess reasons behind degrees of success of the ESDPs in the two different villages, we recorded information about the beliefs and culture of the inhabitants of each village, and confirmed which programs had been introduced. Table 1 shows basic demographics of the two villages.

**Table 1: 2003 population data for the Royal Agricultural Station Ang Khang- Source: Ajarn Tassanee, Royal Project Foundation**

Village	Families	Males	Females	Income	Farmer	Worker	Trader	Misc
Bann Nor Lae	166	397	367	668	300	75	4	1 kindergarten 1 temple
Bann Khob Dong	69	175	135	2000	120	-	104	1 school 1 telephone

## The Lahu of Bann Khob Dong

The residents of Bann Khob Dong belong to the Lahu people. The Lahu also known as the Musser, have set up tribal communities throughout many nations in Southeast Asia. Originally nomadic farmers from Tibet (Srisukho, 2005), Lebar, Hickney, and Musgrave (1964) suggest that the existence of a Lahu kingdom in Tibet during the 17th and 18th centuries. After the Chinese government forced them from Tibet centuries ago, many Lahu relocated to Burma (Srisukho, 2005). In 1875 the Burmese government attempted to remove the Lahu from Burma, which caused many Lahu to flee to Thailand (Srisukho, 2005). In 2004, there were 102,876 Lahu living in Thailand (Tribal Museum, 2004).

The leadership and family structure of the Lahu are central to their way of life. Power in Lahu villages is divided between a spiritual leader and a political leader. The political leader sets laws within the village, enforces these laws, and acts as an ambassador to the Thai government. The spiritual leadership of Lahu villages is a source of moral consultation and impacts deeply the attitudes of the villagers. While the political leader of the village makes policy changes, the spiritual leader's approval is necessary for the policy to gain acceptance in the community. The unique family structure of the Lahu sets them apart from the many other tribes of Thailand. The Lahu have extremely strong family bonds along matrilineal lines. The men are formally considered the figureheads of households, but the majority of decisions are made by women.

The religious practices of the Lahu vary among different tribes. Traditionally the Lahu are theistic animists, but some villages have converted to Buddhism or Christianity. When Lahu do convert to other religions, they do so collectively, as an entire village (Lebar et al, 1964). Lahu animist beliefs include the worship of a primary deity, Gusa, and the appeasement of numerous good and evil spirits (Thailand Development Organization, N.D.).

Bann Khob Dong is home to 69 families, nearly all farming men, and women who produce and sell grass bracelets for tourists. Men spend the day in the fields and many village children attend the Khob Dong primary school, which supports itself with sales from the small general store at the top of the village where tourists often buy snacks. The school's curriculum includes Thai Language, Mathematics, Science, Health, Agriculture, and Physical Education classes and a Boy Scout/Girl Scout program.

Life in Bann Khob Dong revolves around the family and home. Houses in the village are generally constructed of bamboo floors and walls set on stilts with straw roofs and a narrow wooden ramp leading up to the house. Pigs, chickens, and motorcycles are often kept under the house. In the entranceway to the house,

there is usually a small closet-type room used for storage of clothes. Another, larger room doubles as a sleeping space and kitchen, with a small fire for cooking in the center of the room, a shelf suspended from the ceiling above for preserving foods, and mats on the floor for sleeping. All houses in Bann Khob Dong have electricity for lighting. There are no phones in the houses, but there is one public pay phone in the village.

Publicly owned buildings and property are virtually nonexistent. The leader of the village can use a loudspeaker to announce news to the community (Ja-Kha, 2005). Bann Khob Dong has two leaders, Ja-Kha and Ja-Maw. A single rugged dirt road is the only way in or out of the village.

Bann Khob Dong does not have any temples or churches because of the Lahu's animist beliefs (Tassanee, 2005), which permeate deeply into their daily lives. In Bann Khob Dong, there are four 'spiritual houses.' Age and economic status decide who owns the spiritual houses. Each of these houses has two bedrooms, instead of the usual one. In addition, there is a spirit room in the corner of the back room that no one can enter, except the tribe's two spirit doctors during a healing ceremony. During the spirit ceremony, all male "members" of the house (every family in the village belongs to one of the four houses) slaughter a pig and feast on it. With the exception of healing ceremonies, the villagers of Bann Khob Dong eat meat only once a year, during *kin waa*, the New Year ceremony.

## **The Palong of Bann NorLae**

The residents of Bann NorLae are of the Palong people. The Palong originate from the Shan State of Myanmar (Howard & Wattanapun, 2001, p.1). The Palong suffered tremendously in the 1970s and early 1980s when conflict between the Communist Party of Burma and numerous rebel factions resulted in harsh oppression and exploitation of the Palong in the Loi Lae village. This oppression led to the immigration of nearly 2000 Palong to northern Thailand in 1984 (Howard & Wattanapun, 2001, p.77). When Thai King Bhumibhol Adulyadej visited the newly established village, Bann NorLae, he granted the Palong tribe permission to remain in Thailand (Howard & Wattanapun, 2001, p.81). Since their initial migration into Thailand the Palong have settled in six villages: Bann NorLae, Bann Suan Cha, Bann Mae Ram, Bann Pang Mai Dang, Bann Huay Pong, and Bann Mae Jon.

The leadership and family structures of the Palong are comparable to other tribes in Thailand. The local political administrator for the Palong is the village headman, who is responsible for the overall rule of the village, and oversees legal infractions (Howard & Wattanapun, 2001, p.41). The Palong societal structure is patriarchal.

The religion of the Palong includes a practice of Theravada Buddhism and a mix of other spiritual beliefs. Theravada Buddhism is the most commonly practiced form of Buddhism in Myanmar (Srisukho, 2005), while Mahayana Buddhism is common to Thailand. While the majority of the Palong are Buddhist, some have adopted animist or Christian beliefs. For example, the village women often wear traditional dress, including rattan hoops around the waist, called Nong Wong, to remind them that they are descendents of the mythical angel, “Roi Ngern” (Hill Tribe in Royal Project Area, N.D.). The Palong also worship a variety of spirits, or *nats* (Howard & Wattanapun, 2001, p. 37).

Bann Nor Lae contains 166 families. Like Bann Khob Dong, Bann Nor Lae’s most common occupation is farming. Three hundred farmers live in Bann Nor Lae, along with 75 workers (who mostly perform odd jobs around the village) and four merchants. Most men farm, both for subsistence and for sale to the Royal Project Foundation. The women often supplement the family’s income through production and sales of woven scarves. Military personnel aided with setting up looms for weaving as well as a shop at the military base for selling handwoven products. To boost their food supply, many villagers purchase goods, including meat, from a mobile market. This traveling market visits many villages in the Doi Ang Khang area. The market is frequented also by soldiers from Myanmar who are temporarily permitted to cross into Bann Nor Lae at a military border checkpoint. The soldiers primarily purchase food, a restricted commodity at their camp.

Housing in Bann Nor Lae generally consists of single-family bamboo houses on stilts, similar to those of Bann Khob Dong, but with metal roofing and wider entrance ramps. Almost all houses are equipped with electricity for lighting. Along the main road, passing through the center of the village, is the village heart, or *buja rawl*, equipped with loudspeakers for announcements. Drinking water is kept in two reservoirs in Bann Nor Lae, and is also provided by three rivers. Water for the fields is obtained through pipes from Bann Khob Dong and stored in 19 small storage units (Ja-Ring, 2005). A Thai military outpost, established to protect Thailand at the Thai-Burmese is on the outskirts of Bann Nor Lae (Howard & Wattanapun, 2001, p.83–84).

The villagers built a Buddhist temple in Bann Nor Lae. Nor Lae has only one village leader, Ja-Ring. The village has a kindergarten, but does not have a school; the children from Bann Nor Lae attend the Khob Dong primary school (Tassanee, 2005).

## **Methodology of this Study**

The three major objectives of our study were:

1. To combine knowledge of the Lahu and Palong cultures, the Royal Project's implementation of ESDPs in Doi Ang Khang, and the village structures of Bann Khob Dong and Ban Nor Lae to understand fully the culture in which the ESDPs were introduced;
2. To identify the needs expressed by the villagers that have not been addressed by the ESDP, and To identify existing programs that are not being used because the villagers do not understand their purposes;
3. To identify factors that influenced the acceptance of the ESDPs, in order to recommend changes in the programs that will ensure future success.

### **Research Design**

In selecting a research design and data collection methods, we took into account our time limitation and modified standard data collection activities to ensure the maximum validity of our study conducted in a compressed time period. Therefore, our research objectives were often pursued simultaneously, and analysis occurred throughout the duration of our study.

In the first phase of our study we identified which ESDPs had been implemented in the Khob Dong and Nor Lae villages and determined which programs yielded successful outcomes. Archival research, observation, exploratory interviews, and semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data about the programs, and their success or failure in the villages. We used the same methods to identify the factors that are most likely to influence the villagers' acceptance of the programs. Linking the factors of influence to the success or failure of a program was frequently done out of sequence. Because we had little control over the order of our interviews and observation periods, and based them instead on the schedules of the villagers and Royal Project staff, we often had to conduct portions of our data collection and analysis out of order.

We chose a comparative study for our research design. The absence of a long history of information on the health and educational status of the village, and the lack of records on the attitudes of the villagers toward development programs, made time-series oriented designs impossible. A village that constituted a "success" in the opinion of Royal Project officials, one that has responded positively to the ESDPs, would act as the basis of comparison. The Nor Lae village was chosen for purposes of comparative research design. Bann Nor Lae's greater success, its similar relationship to the Ang Khang Research Station, and

its close proximity to Bann Khob Dong, made it the most appropriate secondary site for our study. (Tassanee, 2005). It is important to note that Bann Nor Lae is not a *control* village in our design. The two villages are greatly different in their size and prosperity, as described earlier and detailed in Table 1. These differences were taken into account at all times in the comparative study

### **Prerequisite Activities: Understanding Village Dynamics and Developing Rapport**

We observed the community to gain an understanding of its social, political, and infrastructural systems in order to analyze the programs in light of all the contextual factors that impact community acceptance of ESDPs. The success of our assessment was highly dependent on our ability to make inroads into the village communities and understand the social and political structures of the tribes. We observed and recorded activities that occurred and identified the key features of the villages.

We had to gain acceptance with the villagers so that observation could take place unhindered. This was no easy task, because as outsiders, we were sometimes received with skepticism and caution in the villages. Most of the homes in which we conducted interviews had never been visited by foreigners before. Our presence often created a new and strange experience for the members of the village. Before our assessment could begin, we had to create relationships with the villagers so that they felt comfortable having honest discussions about the needs of their community.

### **Archival Research**

Archival research on the Royal Project Foundation and the types of programs established for tribal communities was conducted at Chiang Mai University library, and at orientation sessions at the Royal Project Center in Chiang Mai and the Ang Khang Royal Project Station. However, we were never given a complete outline of the programs that had been offered, which forced us to investigate firsthand exactly which programs had been implemented in Bann Khob Dong and Bann Nor Lae, and observe how the programs were being used in both villages.

Archival research aided us in obtaining information on the usage of ESDP programs in the villages. For example, in order to determine the usage of the Ang Khang Health Clinic, we obtained a listing of all the villagers who used the clinic in the past three years. Based on the names of the patients, a translator determined how many people from each village had used the clinic from January 2002 to January 2005.

## Observation

Observation provided another method for measuring success of the ES-DPs. We recorded events that occurred and mapped the physical attributes of the village (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 95-97). We also recorded the infrastructure improvements of the villages and saw how villagers made use of the Royal Project programs and facilities.

Observation was a very powerful data collection method that helped us to develop a rapport with the villagers that laid the ground well for the use of other more intrusive methods later with the study communities. Observation was an ideal method for recording what transpired in the villages, because it could be done at any time. This method also had the advantage of avoiding the personal biases of villagers or Royal Project personnel that might be problematic in interviews or surveys. We began our data collection on activities in the villages by observing, which allowed villagers to grow accustomed to our presence before we started talking to them and conducting interviews. Observation continued throughout the study.

## Interviews

To track the rationale behind the events we witnessed and to identify the needs of the villagers, we relied on villager opinion, which we gathered through two types of interviews. Exploratory interviews, which utilize a loose structure that enables flexible discussion in an informal setting, were often conducted while touring the villages. Our informants in the villages tended to be our guides, village leaders, or other persons of authority. These informants communicated using the Thai and English languages for the sake of accuracy and simplicity of our interviews. We did not include any villagers who spoke only the Lahu language, in order to eliminate the need for a Lahu to Thai translator. We did not need a very broad array of opinions for this phase of our study, so interviewees who spoke only Lahu were unnecessary. The majority of these interviews were recorded through note-taking.

After revealing important areas of development through our observations and exploratory interviews, we developed semi-structured interview questions that would probe deeper into these topics, to obtain specific information about the projects and their success. We began our semi-structured interviews with village leaders and expanded them to include individuals who held less prominent positions within the villages. The semi-structured interview format was more useful than focus groups or surveying because of the hierarchical power structure of the villages. The relatively short time we had in which to conduct

our study and the availability of the villagers (the villagers work in the fields all day, leaving only a few hours to perform data collection at night) meant we could not effectively conduct accurate surveys. We interviewed a number of people in both villages of varying gender, social status, economic status, and education level. It was often necessary to use both Lahu-Thai and Thai-English translators for these interviews. In addition to taking notes, we recorded longer and more intensive interviews on audiotape.

While the semi-structured format allows for less fluidity than exploratory interviews, it still accommodated our interviewees if they wanted to discuss some topics more thoroughly than others (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 149-151). Thus, semi-structured interviews allowed us to obtain a greater amount of detail on the topics that were most important to the villagers and to question them about factors that influenced their decisions to use ESDPs.

After determining why some ESDPs were unsuccessful, we used exploratory interviews and semi-structured interviews to identify villager needs. Identifying the needs of the hill tribes in Ang Khang was necessary in order to decipher the differences between the villagers' desires and the goals of the ESDPs. The ability to close this gap would allow for greater success of future ESDPs. Surprisingly, many villagers were ready to discuss their wants and needs with minimal prompting during the exploratory interviews. We then introduced these topics in subsequent semi-structured interviews to obtain further details about the most frequently mentioned needs.

Exploratory interviews were used to obtain some basic information about the needs of the villagers. Our observations and raw data regarding existing ESDPs were useful for defining some of the problems in the villages. We developed our questions around a number of areas such as health, education, and infrastructure. We relied on a small number of Thai-speaking informants and the village leadership as subjects for these interviews. These loosely structured interviews sufficiently defined a number of problems facing villagers in Bann Khob Dong and Bann Nor Lae.

Through semi-structured interviews we were able to gain insights into the needs of the villagers, how villagers coped with the absence of resources to deal with these needs, and occasionally obtain solutions for meeting these needs. The questions for these interviews were largely determined by the responses we obtained in our exploratory interviews. In order to develop an understanding of the variation of needs and how village needs affect different people, we interviewed villagers varying in social status, economic status, and level of education.

We then applied our knowledge of ESDPs to determine if these needs were already being addressed by a program. If the needs were being addressed, unbeknownst to the villagers, we then tried to pinpoint the reason for misunderstanding. If the needs were not being addressed, we would recommend a new program. In order to make these connections, we needed to organize and analyze our raw data according to proven qualitative research methods.

## **Data Analysis, Organization and Weighting**

The main goal of our analysis was to identify where the communication gaps that prevented ESDPs from satisfying villager needs had occurred. Data was cataloged by problem domain. We used a bottom-up analysis method to form the relational structures that explain the attitudes and behaviors of the villagers. Placing a heavier weight on the opinions of community leaders and teachers integrated the significance of existing social structure of tribal culture. Through daily note comparisons and the usage of triangulation, we were able to ensure the validity of our study.

We coded our notes based on development objectives. Areas such as health care, education, village infrastructure and religion were chosen as the most important. We then broke down these objectives into sub-categories and applied them to our notes, so that bits of information could be organized by objective. Once our data was organized, patterns emerged. These patterns determined the most significant villager needs.

For our analysis to be valid and in-sync with the cultures of the villages, it was important to acknowledge the village power structures.

### **Data Analysis**

The iterative nature of our study led to our using a synthesis of deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) analysis. Initially we depended on bottom-up analysis to identify the program areas that were most relevant to our study and develop them as codes. After the initial stages of our study, we wanted to obtain more focused data on issues that were most relevant to understanding specific programs and villager needs, so we began using top-down analysis. These programs and needs were reflected in our coding system. Top-down analysis was an excellent way to examine the structures that we had defined earlier, either providing these structures with greater depth or finding counter-evidence to refute them.

Using these two methods of analysis together we were able to identify reoccurring themes or patterns in our data. The patterns that emerged helped

us form a broader understanding about the structure of the community and the problems they face (e.g. the impacts of religion on the Lahu across many aspects of their lives such as health, economics, and education). Despite our best efforts to code and analyze the data we had collected, there was incomplete information, inconclusive results and source bias that compromised the validity of some of our data.

### **Limitations and Validity**

To obtain valid data, we had to account for the fact that we were foreigners to the country, and novices in the professional fields that our study encompassed. Just as we searched for honesty with the hill tribe villagers and the program coordinators, we had to question constantly the validity of our analysis and interpretations. Focus was placed on our observational skills and good judgment to avoid falling into the trap of over-generalizing and making narrow assumptions. Our greatest strength was our impartiality to the villagers and the Royal Project Foundation. By comparing and coding our notes daily, we were able to question and confirm our mutual findings.

We used triangulation to determine the validity of our data and to confirm that trends existed across the entire community. Triangulation enabled us to test our conclusions to make certain there was redundancy in the correlations we discovered. When we recorded our observations, it became clear that some factors are universally recognized. We attempted to interview numerous people about the same issues to determine if their statements were merely a personalized view of the community or formed part of a larger consensus. We were able to ensure greater validity to our findings by obtaining information through a variety of sources such as statistical data, observation, and interviews.

Our study was limited by time constraints, language barriers, and scheduling difficulties. Our interviews were condensed into a few visits to the villages. English-Thai translators were used for all interviews and some interviews also required the use of Lahu-Thai translators. Older members of Bann Khob Dong and Bann Nor Lae sometimes had difficulty understanding our questions in Thai language interviews. The schedules of our translators and interviewees also impacted the frequency with which we could conduct interviews. All interviews were arranged through our informants in the villages. While they attempted to provide us with interviewees from a variety of economic and social standings, we do not have sufficient knowledge of the villages to claim that we achieved an adequate level of diversity in our informants.

## **Findings and Discussion: Disconnects Between ESDPs and the Villages**

To identify the reasons why the ESDPs have not achieved the desired level of success in Bann Khob Dong and to provide culturally appropriate recommendations for their improvement, we identified two types of miscommunication between the Royal Project and the villagers: *implementation gaps* and *needs communication gaps*. Implementation gaps are what prevented the inhabitants of Bann Khob Dong from making use of ESDPs. Needs communication gaps keep the Royal Project from identifying villager needs.

More specifically, we determined that the main causes of program failure were disconnects between the providers of the ESDPs and the hill tribe communities and we isolated three different forms of these disconnects: (1) The villagers have priorities which dominate their lives and prevent them from making use of certain development programs; (2) The villagers do not understand the benefits provided by ESDPs; (3) The Royal Project does not recognize the development needs and priorities of the villagers.

### **I. Village Priorities Affecting Development and the ESDPs: Religion and Social Structure**

We found a large difference in the attitude toward development between the Palong and Lahu communities. The Palong tribe of Bann Nor Lae attempts to embrace modernization, while the Lahu of Bann Khob Dong adhere to traditional social and religious culture in the belief that they can persist sufficiently without further development. The family structure and religious beliefs of Bann Khob Dong conflict with the priorities of the ESDPs.

In Bann Nor Lae, the villagers express an apparent motivation to improve their standard of living. This ambition to develop does not exist in Bann Khob Dong. For example, the Royal Project has arranged a Young Leader's program, supported by UNICEF. The youth at Bann Khob Dong have completed all of the necessary preparation for their project, and they have 10,000 Baht set aside in a bank account for use in their project. However, despite all of their work to earn the funding, the youths have not used their 10,000 Baht to implement their project (Tassanee 2005).

Another example of the Lahu attitude toward development arose during an interview with Strawberry, a 33-year-old villager at Bann Khob Dong. When we asked him about his needs and what he would like to change about the village, he replied that he would like a new-style (cement foundation) house (Strawberry, 2005). However, he mentioned no attempt at raising money to build this home.

In contrast, the people of Bann Nor Lae have worked very hard to develop their village. For example, when touring the village one day, we observed a few men laying a cement foundation for a new house. One of the men informed us that he had seen this type of new-style house outside of the village and had thought it would be a good idea for a new home. He then drove to the nearby city of Fang and bought cinder blocks and cement materials, brought them back in his pickup truck, and began building a new house. This man used his money that he had earned (not funding from the Royal Project or any other organizations) and initiated the project himself.

This man's behavior seems to be characteristic of the Palong mentality of self-development, as there were various houses being built at the time of our visits. In addition, the people of Bann Nor Lae are much more inclined to purchase new products (e.g. cell phones, motorbikes, and pickup trucks), whereas the Lahu of Bann Khob Dong tend to be satisfied with what they have (P'Jaa, 2005). Despite this observation, some Lahu households have purchased television sets and motorcycles. Although the Lahu have accepted these modern conveniences, they will not adopt important practices such as latrine usage. The Lahu claimed that they avoided latrines because of their unfamiliarity with them, but to an outsider a television set or motorcycle would be even more foreign to an underdeveloped community. The difficulty in understanding the perspective of the Lahu people towards modernization is yet another reminder of the incongruity between the priorities of the tribe and those of the forward-looking Thai implementers of the ESDPs.

The difference in attitudes towards obtaining possessions also helps to explain the statistical data we received from the Royal Project Foundation (see Table 1). According to this data, the average per capita income in Bann Khob Dong is 2,000 Baht per month, whereas it is only 668 Baht per month in Bann Nor Lae (Tassanee, 2005). There was a great disparity between this data and our observations of the two villages. The Nor Lae Village appears to be much wealthier than Bann Khob Dong, as Bann Nor Lae has developed more successfully and the villagers have many more possessions. The confusion over the incomes of the villages could be explained by translation and miscommunication problems when the data was collected. The past violent exploitation of the Palong at the hands of military forces in Myanmar may have contributed to a distrust of the Thai military unit that conducted the census, thereby compromising the data.

Regardless of the validity of this statistical data, we can be certain of our observations: villagers of Bann Nor Lae value possessions more than the villagers of Bann Khob Dong. The Nor Lae villagers also demonstrate a greater ambition

to improve their quality of life, as shown by the existence of personally funded cement houses in the village. This observation, compared with the failure of the villagers of Bann Khob Dong to use available funding, reinforce our finding that the Lahu villagers simply lack a motivation to develop.

We found that the Lahu's cultural traditions take precedence over the development priorities set by the Royal Project Foundation, and directly inhibit the use of ESDPs. The effects of religion and family structure adversely impact the acceptance of ESDPs within Bann Khob Dong. Lahu spirit worship inhibits health care programs and economic development in the Khob Dong village. Close family ties in the Lahu prevent many children from leaving home to receive a higher education. Conversely, the religion and family structure in Bann Nor Lae do not conflict with existing development programs.

The religious differences between the Lahu and Palong tribes of Doi Ang Khang have a tremendous impact on the acceptance of ESDPs. The deistic animism of the Lahu promotes the use of spiritual healing ceremonies that often hinder the use of modern medicine. These traditional methods of healing are often emphasized over seeking out modern medical treatment. The Palong tribe of Bann Nor Lae is primarily Buddhist, although a small minority are said to practice Christianity or spiritualism (Ja-Chi, 2005). Since the Buddhist tradition of the Palong provides no alternative means of medical treatment, religion does not threaten program acceptance in Bann Nor Lae.

Many villagers at Bann Khob Dong turn to the spirit doctors of the village instead of the nearby health clinic or hospital when they fall ill. While some villagers believe in the power of modern medicine, others rely solely on the power of the spirit doctor to pay merit and appease the spirits that cause or cure disease (Ja-Kha, 2005). This spiritual belief inhibits appropriate use of modern medicine, which can lead to health problems. We have found that the villagers are aware of the clinic's existence; however, the usage of the clinic is not consistent in the tribe.

The competition between modern medicine and spiritual ceremonies in Bann Khob Dong yielded mixed responses during interviews with the Lahu regarding their medical treatment. For example, Ja-Heh, a villager of Bann Khob Dong, goes directly to Ja-Maw, the spiritual leader of the village, when he becomes ill. If the illness is very serious, Ja-Heh will go to the free health clinic at nearby Bann Khum (Ja-Heh, 2005). Strawberry, another villager at Bann Khob Dong of similar age and social status to Ja-Heh, uses spiritual healing in a different way. He will first go to the health clinic, then he will see Ja-Maw if the illness is serious (Strawberry, 2005). Although methods of usage differ,

all of the villagers interviewed in Bann Khob Dong expressed a respect for the healing ceremonies and a drive to integrate this practice into their lives.

All of the Palong villagers from Bann Nor Lae we interviewed replied that they visit the health clinic when they are sick. (Sang Tamon, Juang Pang, Sam Ray Kam, 2005). We interviewed three families from Bann Nor Lae, ranging from very poor to very wealthy, and asked them questions about health care. Both Sang Tamon, who had no electricity in his house, and Juang Pang, one of the richest people in the village, agreed that they visit the health clinic for illnesses and injuries. The Palong's Buddhist beliefs, which do not advocate spiritual healing, do not present obstacles to obtaining modern medical treatment.

The spiritual beliefs of the Lahu of Bann Khob Dong and the Palong of Bann Nor Lae affect the economics of each village in vastly different ways. While Buddhist practices have not had negative effects on development in Bann Nor Lae, animist traditions have put an economic strain on the village of Khob Dong. Much of the scarce resources of Bann Khob Dong are spent on the Lahu healing ceremonies and New Year's celebration. These ceremonies impede the economic development that the Royal Project is attempting to promote in Bann Khob Dong.

A Lahu healing ceremony entails a significant economic investment, mostly in the form of livestock. Members of the Khob Dong village save their pigs for slaughter during the ceremonies. All members of the family spend the day feasting together, missing a day of work. Ja-Maw (the spiritual leader of Bann Khob Dong) informed us that the healing ceremonies are performed "very often" (Ja-Maw, 2005). The Lahu New Year's ceremony tends to be even more costly than individual healing ceremonies to each family, and consequently to the Khob Dong village as a whole. Preparations for the New Year begin one month before the ceremony begins. Some preparations, such as sewing traditional outfits, start as early as three months ahead of time (Ja-Chi, 2005). According to Ittasak Srisukho, a hill tribe researcher at the Tribal Institute in Chiang Mai City, the villagers of Bann Khob Dong stop working for one month, which negatively affects the village's economy (Ittasak Srisukho, 2005).

The villagers' adherence to the aforementioned practices could not be fully validated, which limits our theory about the economic and health strains caused by spiritual beliefs. However, the archival research, observation, and interview results have provided our team with enough substance over these issues to address them as significant findings. The animistic practices of the Lahu are a drain on the scarce resources of Bann Khob Dong. The impacts of Buddhist holidays on the economy of Bann Nor Lae are not known, but there is no indication that Buddhism has had any negative economic impacts on Bann Nor Lae.

The levels of acceptance of ESDPs by the villagers of Bann Nor Lae and Bann Khob Dong are closely tied to their adherence to different religious practices. Maintaining traditional healing ceremonies is a priority of the Lahu of Bann Khob Dong, despite the efforts of ESDPs to educate the villagers about modern medicine and encourage its use. Palong beliefs have no perceivable impact on the villagers' decisions to use modern medicine. Thus, the Palong tribe's medical health priorities are more comparable to those of the ESDPs than the spiritual healing traditions of the Lahu tribe. Despite the obvious costs associated with Lahu ceremonies, the villagers of Bann Khob Dong choose not to adapt their behaviors to become more compatible with mainstream Thai culture. The Lahu have a clear affinity for their traditional customs and do not express a motivation to change their ways in order to aid development efforts.

The traditional familial structure and strong family ties of Bann Khob Dong hinder the progress of many ESDPs, while the familial structure in Bann Nor Lae simplifies communication with ESDP coordinators and supports the priorities of the ESDPs. Families in Nor Lae are patriarchal, but we have seen no evidence that the rights of women are abused in any way. In fact, the male-controlled family structure provides an efficient decision-making process that saves time during community projects. The male laborers' power to make economic decisions increases their motivation to work and earn money. In Bann Khob Dong, the man of the house is usually the worker and nominal leader of the household, while the wife controls economic decisions, slowing the progress of community projects and adversely impacting the community's economy (Ittasak Srisukho, 2005). Lahu society values the traditional family structure and traditions over economic prosperity and the advancement that would come with accepting development initiatives.

The traditional gender roles of the Lahu have had a negative impact on the economy of Bann Khob Dong. The matriarchal society enforces a tradition in which newlywed couples move into the woman's family's home. The man is then indentured to his wife's family for three years following the marriage ceremony. This custom causes motivation to deteriorate, as the worker receives no benefits for his labor. As a result, the men of the Khob Dong village often do not produce agricultural products to their full capacity, and the economic status of the family declines. Because this custom is not practiced in Palong tribes, husbands retain the benefits of their labor, reinforcing the motivation to work and earn money (Ittasak Srisukho, 2005).

Our time constraints, the presence of wives at interviewing sessions, and the language barrier prevented us from interviewing a sufficient number of Lahu men about their feelings about this practice. As was the case in Bann Khob Dong, the entire family was often present during interviews, preventing

us from delving into the subject of the economic effects of familial structure too thoroughly in Bann Nor Lae. However, it is clear that preserving the traditional Lahu post-marriage practice, despite its subsequent deterioration of work ethic, is more important to the Lahu of Bann Khob Dong than abandoning the practice in favor of economic advancement.

The acceptance of education, especially at the higher levels, is adversely affected by the close-knit familial structure of the villagers of Bann Khob Dong. The families of Bann Nor Lae have not shown signs of rejecting higher education in order to remain with the family. This difference is significant because children must leave the village and live in Fang in order to attend high school.

The strong family ties that prevent villagers from leaving Bann Khob Dong for a significant period of time often prevent children from boarding at secondary school and high school in Fang. Scholarship programs are available for secondary school in Fang, but most children do not want to leave their parents and will attend the secondary school at Bann Khum or receive no secondary schooling at all. Some girls are afraid to go as far away as Bann Khum for secondary school (Khurium Singtom, 2005). This reluctance to leave their home village restricts educational and economic opportunities for the young generation and their families. In contrast, Ja-Ring (the leader of Bann Nor Lae) has stated that the main factor which determines whether or not a Palong student will attend high school is the family's ability to pay (Ja-Ring, 2005).

Without a higher education, it is difficult for members of both tribes to find well-paying jobs. For the residents of Bann Khob Dong, job opportunities outside of Doi Ang Khang are often unappealing because they would require leaving the village and their families. As for villagers of Bann Nor Lae, the situation is often out of their hands; without ID cards from the Thai government they can not work outside of the province or attend college.

The traditional family structure of the Lahu harms the educational and economic development of Bann Khob Dong. By valuing a close-knit family, villagers miss opportunities to further their education and expand their employment opportunities. These familial traditions are not valued as highly in the Palong culture, which is one explanation for the greater level of educational and economic success in the Nor Lae village.

## **II. Misunderstood ESDP Priorities: Health, Nutrition, Sanitation, and Education**

One prevalent problem in Bann Khob Dong, which seems to be a lesser problem in Bann Nor Lae, is a lack of knowledge that leads to a misunderstanding

of the benefits of the ESDPs. Khob Dong villagers are unable to discern why certain developmental goals should be made priorities in their village, leading to a lack of acceptance of ESDPs. Khob Dong villagers often seem unaware of simple health practices that are typically accepted as normal activities in the Nor Lae village. These practices include bathroom usage, personal hygiene, proper nutrition, family planning and drinking clean water. Many of these issues have been addressed in development programs for Bann Khob Dong, but the Lahu villagers do not seem to understand the underlying health benefits of such activities, or rather chose to retain their traditional practices rather than accepting the new ones. Although the Royal Project has offered education about family planning and the importance of clean drinking water, the people of Bann Khob Dong do not seem to understand these key health considerations or desire to put them into practice.

It is clear that neither village comprehends that bacteria exists in their drinking water, which comes from streams in Thailand and Myanmar. In Bann Nor Lae, all of the interviewees, ranging from the poorest villager to one of the wealthiest families in the village, answered that they do not boil drinking water (Sang Tamon, Juang Pang, Sam Ray Kam, 2005). When we inquired about the possibility of boiling water in Bann Khob Dong, our guide told us that some households did practice this water purification method (Ja-Chi, 2005). However, we did not encounter any individuals who boiled water for household use. Therefore, we cannot be fully certain that any members of the village purify their water before drinking.

In the case of contraceptive use, attempts to promote family planning have failed in Bann Khob Dong. The Khob Dong villagers know little or nothing about the biological process of conceiving a child or how this can be prevented by the usage of contraceptives. Ja-Kha, the political leader of Bann Khob Dong, has stated that he believes the people would be more likely to use contraceptives if they understood how they prevented pregnancy (Ja-Kha, 2005). Discerning local understanding of contraceptive use in Bann Nor Lae was more difficult. It is possible that the villagers may not have been comfortable talking with strangers about such personal topics. We did observe that the poorer homes in Bann Nor Lae had fewer children. The richest family we visited had 8 children, all very well cared for. It appears that the population in Bann Nor Lae is in fact under control, whether or not they understand the benefits of family planning.

Little progress has been made in either village in the area of nutrition. The villagers do not pay attention to how what they are eating will nourish their bodies. The heads of three different households in Khob Dong Village said that they simply eat whatever is available at the time – usually just rice and a few

vegetables. The villagers of Bann Nor Lae did not express any more nutritional discretion than the Khob Dong villagers when choosing their foods. When asked how they choose what they eat, they said they either eat what they've grown in the fields, what they feel like eating (Sang Tamon, Sam Ray Kam, 2005), or what they can afford at the time (Juang Pang, 2005).

However, the same villagers of Bann Nor Lae assured us that they think the food they eat is nutritious (Sang Tamon, Sam Ray Kam, Juang Pang, 2005). We did not monitor their eating and cooking habits. According to P'Jaa, a public relations employee at the Ang Khang Research Station, the Palong at Bann Nor Lae eat meat regularly, while the religious beliefs of the Lahu of Bann Khob Dong dictate that they only eat meat at the healing ceremony, when they are already sick, and at their New Year's ceremony.

The Lahu of Bann Khob Dong also fall far behind the Palong of Bann Nor Lae in the acceptance of personal hygiene habits. Although the younger generation is making progress, the majority of the villagers do not keep themselves clean. According to Ja-Kha, the political leader of Bann Khob Dong, the children shower daily and use soap and shampoo, but most of the older people only bathe once every two or three months. Comparatively, in the Nor Lae we were able to observe a higher level of cleanliness. According to one of the villagers of Bann Nor Lae, showering regularly is a common practice, except during the dry season when water must be conserved (Sam Ray Kam, 2005).

The two villages have differing practices for toilet usage. Most houses in Bann Nor Lae are equipped with toilets (Ja-Ring, 2005). The Khob Dong village has two sanitary public latrines with three toilets each, but the people there continue to follow the tradition of relieving themselves in the woods. When questioned, many Lahu villagers said that they were unfamiliar with the bathrooms. Ja-Kha (the political leader of Bann Khob Dong) explained that the people are content with their old customs and have no motivation to change them. He did not think that they would use the toilets even if each house had its own bathroom. The villagers clearly do not understand that relieving themselves in the woods and infrequent showering can lead to the breeding of illness-causing bacteria, or choose to ignore this knowledge. In Bann Nor Lae, villagers regularly use toilets

It would be untrue to say that the introduction of good nutrition, hygiene, and sanitary latrines has completely failed in Khob Dong. The one place both villages have seen great success is in the Khob Dong School. The schoolchildren are required to use toilets while they are at school and are inspected every morning for cleanliness. If the teacher does not think the child is clean enough to come into the classroom, an older student will escort the child to clean up

in the bathroom. Aacaan Khurium, a teacher and the current principal of the school, has implemented these programs with success. She has also started a school lunch program in which the students bring rice to school, and the school supplements the rice with nutritious food. They have a lesson every day at lunchtime about what they are eating and how it is good for their health. However, even Aacaan Khurium acknowledges that the students often return to their old practices when they leave school. She believes that if any of the practices she teaches them remain in use, the situation is better than it was before (Khurium Singtom, 2005). Consistent attendance is a major problem and priority at the Khob Dong School. Aacaan Khurium reported that the students from Bann Khob Dong skip class more often than the children from Bann Nor Lae (Khurium Simton, 2005).

Our 19 year-old guide, Ja-Chi, was one of the very few high school students in the Khob Dong village. He gave us some helpful insights on the feelings of the village parents towards education. Parents see primary school as a place where the younger children can go during the day to get a nutritious meal and be supervised while their parents are working in the fields or making handicrafts. Some children will skip class and return home after their parents have gone to work. When the parents find out, they take little care, and the child receives no punishment (Ja-Chi, 2005).

Most of the parents in the Khob Dong village attended only primary school (grades 1-6), if they attended school at all. Many parents in the Khob Dong village believe that after sixth grade, a child is ready to go to work. Girls will then sell handicrafts and boys will look after the buffalo. The current parental generation received minimal schooling and there are low expectations for their children to achieve anything more than that. For them, a twelve year-old child working in the fields or herding buffalo is more profitable to the family. They cannot look past the short-term benefits of work to see the long term benefits of higher education.

Parents of the Nor Lae Village better understand the benefits provided by continued education. The main factor affecting higher education in Bann Nor Lae is the economic status of the villagers. All parents with whom we spoke at this village said that they would like their children to pursue education through high school, if not further, if they could afford to do so (Sang Tamon, Sam Ray Kam, Juang Pang, 2005). Most students from Bann Nor Lae attend the secondary school in Bann Khum, which is not the case for the children of Bann Khob Dong. According to the Palong leader Ja-Ring, any child whose parents have enough money will attend high school (Ja-Ring, 2005).

Although the parents of Bann Khob Dong do not generally push their children to excel in the higher levels of school, the situation has seen some improvement since the Khob Dong School was built in 1984. The most surprising change in opinion was exhibited by Ja-Maw, the spiritual leader of Khob Dong. At the time the school was built, Ja-Maw helped in the building effort, but did not try to persuade the children of the village to attend. He believed that since he had not gone to school and was still alive, the children of the village could survive without it as well (Tassanee, 2004). Now, at the (reported) age of 76, Ja-Maw has changed his mind. He expressed that children should finish primary school and secondary school. He even punishes children by hitting them if he finds out that they are skipping class too frequently. He believes that learning to read and write the Thai language will help them to find jobs in Doi Ang Khang that will help to improve their financial status (Ja-Maw, 2005). Ja-Maw's change in opinion may be indicative that the village is taking steps in the right direction.

Although our data collection about education was encouraging at times, it may not have been completely valid. One evening, a teacher attended our interviews with a few Khob Dong villagers. Her presence may have caused the household leaders with whom we spoke to talk about their views on schooling more positively than they otherwise might have. As for Ja-Maw, the interviewing was slow and he repeated himself often. His frequent periods of distraction and confusion made us concerned that old age was beginning to affect his ability to provide accurate responses. However, we believe that despite these instances we have collected sufficient reliable data to support our aforementioned claims.

The inability of the Lahu of Bann Khob Dong to understand why the Royal Project viewed certain ESDPs as priorities for development caused the villagers to reject many of those programs. Upon further inquiry, we determined that the villagers did not wish to compromise their traditions and beliefs in order to embrace the ESDPs which were being offered, and felt that their needs were not being properly addressed by the ESDPs.

### **III. Misunderstood Hill Tribe Priorities: Inefficient Transportation and Insufficient Agricultural Water**

The Royal Projects have tried to improve the quality of life of the hill tribe people by introducing ESDPs. However, what the Royal Project Foundation and what the villagers of Bann Khob Dong consider important has led to limited developmental success in this village. The villagers are disinterested in some of the ESDPs, including family planning, latrine usage, and the Youth Leaders Program. In the Royal Project Foundation's opinion, these programs

offer valuable opportunities to develop skills and improve the standard of living at Bann Khob Dong. However, the Lahu villagers of Bann Khob Dong tend to value different types of improvements. This disconnect tends to be less extreme in the case of the Nor Lae village, as the ESDPs have tried to address the main needs of this village. However, the ESDP implementers do not seem to understand the full extent of the problems, and the ESDPs could be improved for both villages.

The Khob Dong village is accessible by only one dirt road. In the rainy season, it becomes so muddy that trucks cannot make the ride up the hill. This has serious implications for the health and well-being of the people because it is difficult for them to seek medical attention in the case of an emergency. Women in labor have to be carried up the hill by several men on a stretcher. For this reason, many children are born in the village instead of the hospital or health clinic during the rainy season. The impassibility of the road also deprives those with life threatening illnesses of quality health care. The extent of the health problems caused by the road conditions is unclear. However, despite some other severe developmental problems in Bann Khob Dong, the villagers almost always identify the rough conditions of the road as a larger problem than sanitation, nutrition, or family planning.

Nearly every villager mentioned the road conditions when questioned about the problems of the village. In fact, the village had requested funding for road improvement from the Fang district government, but their request was not answered (Ja-Chi, 2005). Instead of finding a way to pool resources to fix the road themselves, the villagers have simply accepted that the road will not receive the necessary funding to make improvements. The villagers seem content with waiting for help rather than addressing the problem directly, or they have other priorities that are more deserving of their time.

The other infrastructure problem that was repeatedly mentioned in interviews is the shortage of agricultural water in Bann Nor Lae (Ja-Ring, 2005, Sang Tamon, Sam Ray Kam, Juang Pang, 2005). In this village, sections of farmland must be left fallow because there is not enough water to support crops on all of the available land. This poses a large economic problem because the villagers' main source of income is agriculture. According to Ja-Ring, the leader of Bann Nor Lae, the water is piped to the Bann Nor Lae village after the people of Bann Khob Dong receive it. He believes that there is only enough water for one village. The larger population and greater number of fields run by the Palong in Bann Nor Lae suffer the most from the lack of water (Ja-Ring, 2005).

The top problem identified by the Nor Lae villagers, the lack of agricultural water, is one that the Royal Project Foundation has recognized and tried to address, but it is not one that can be easily fixed. The queen has tried to help the situation by donating an irrigation system to Bann Khob Dong and Bann Nor Lae. A new holding tank has also been constructed within the past year (Tassanee 2005). However, as Aacaan Tassanee Srimongkol informed us, the water shortage experienced in the Nor Lae village is widespread throughout northern Thailand in the dry season. The attitudes of the Royal Project staff we interviewed about the water shortage were that the problem of decreased agricultural production (and income) could not be completely corrected with improvements to the irrigation system, or that such improvements are cost prohibitive.

While improvements to irrigation systems cannot provide more water for the fields of the Nor Lae village, other potential development programs could help solve the larger economic problem that stems from the water shortage. The Royal Project Foundation has a clear understanding of the agricultural water problem; however, they have not shown an understanding of the possibilities for addressing the resulting economic needs of the villagers. The ESDPs have attempted to increase the water supply but have not considered alternate forms of income to supplement dry season crop sales.

## **Summary**

Some Education and Social Development Programs have experienced more success than others in Doi Ang Khang. The Khob Dong village has been slower to progress than the Nor Lae village, but nonetheless has experienced some improvements. Many developmental initiatives are being taught to children through the Khob Dong School. As there is no simple way to teach the parents to change their health, sanitation, and nutrition habits, the older generation is the main inhibitor of progress in the Khob Dong village. As children grow up and raise their own families, developmental concepts now being taught will be passed down to future generations. Unfortunately, there is no way to speed up this process short of generous monetary incentives or military intervention.

The reasons for this slow and sometimes incomplete success are based on three types of differing priorities between the hill tribe villagers and the ESDPs: Lahu villager traditions that are valued over addressing economic and health problems, Lahu and Palong villagers' misunderstanding of benefits of the ESDPs, and a miscommunication or misunderstanding (by the ESDP implementers) of villagers' needs. We have found that while there are no problems inherent in

the ESDPs themselves, there are deeply-rooted societal issues of poverty and a lack of knowledge that impede the progress of the programs.

The fact that development-impeding priorities rooted in the Lahu's cultural traditions also raise problems with the ESDPs sheds light on an ethical dilemma that faces many development organizations. Maintaining the traditions of minority cultures, such as the different cultures of the hill tribes in the Doi Ang Khang region, is a respectable goal. Forcing assimilation on these cultures is not the most morally appropriate option. However, the Lahu villagers are offered benefits as citizens of Thailand and they are also subject to the will of the Thai government. As outsiders, we cannot determine the ethical implications of developing these societies through assimilation of religion, social structure, or cultural values. However, we can still delve into the underlying issues of poverty and misunderstanding between the hill tribe villagers and the implementers of the ESDPs. Although it will take many years for Bann Khob Dong to achieve a high level of development, intermediary steps can be taken. Culturally appropriate short-term and long-term recommendations have been made to the Royal Project Foundation. Future comprehensive studies will be needed to address the problems of poverty and misunderstanding that are detrimental to the educational and social development of the Khob Dong and Nor Lae villages.

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## Informants

- Ja-Chi: Khob Dong villager, high school student
- Ja-Heh: Khob Dong villager, older brother of Ja-Chi
- P’Jaa: Public Relations, Royal Agricultural Station Ang Khang. Ja-Kha: Political leader of Bann Khob Dong
- Ja-Maw: Spiritual leader of Bann Khob Dong
- Dr. Nuntavarn: Associate Dean, College of Public Health, Chulalongkorn University. Liaison to the Royal Projects
- Sam Ray Kam: Nor Lae villager
- Juang Pang: Nor Lae villager
- Khurium Singtom: The principal of Khob Dong School.
- Mr. Ittasak Srisukho: Tribal Research Institute researcher. Expert on hill tribe culture in Thailand.
- Strawberry: Khob Dong villager, son of Ja-Maw

Sang Tamon: Nor Lae villager

Ajarn Tassanee: Project Director, FP/RH Development for Northern Thailand.  
Sponsor and liaison to our project.

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