



FACTS

REFUGEE RELIEF AND RELOCATION

A Project of the USAID Mission to Laos

PHOTOGRAPHS

As early as 1954, after the signing of the Geneva Agreements, refugees began moving southward from the northern provinces of Laos: Phong Saly, Houa Khong, Houa Phan. Most of the refugees were Meo, inhabitants of the mountains of northern Laos, who practice a slash-and-burn agriculture and who find it difficult to live at altitudes lower than 3,000 feet. The precise number of these early refugees is not known; however, it is estimated that in 1958 there were approximately 27,000 Meo and other hill-tribe refugees living in the mountainous regions of Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang provinces.

In 1959, when the refugees numbered 40,000, the U. S. foreign aid mission in Laos assigned a staff to help the Royal Lao Government with refugee relief. In 1960, when the refugees numbered 90,000, the aid mission allocated funds to cover the cost of airdropping rice to refugees in the mountains of northern Laos, and in 1963, when the refugees numbered almost 120,000, Refugee Relief and Relocation was established as a project under an agreement between the U. S. Government and the Royal Lao Government.

The political and military skirmishes that followed the 1962 Geneva Agreements increased the number of refugee movements; however, the refugee population remained relatively stable between 110,000 to 130,000 people until the last three months of 1968. Each year during the mid-1960's, some 20,000 to 30,000 people became refugees; however, each year an almost equal number of refugees became self-sufficient and no longer required assistance.

Since 1968, the war has increased in scope and intensity; during the past three years, the number of refugees has increased by more than 100,000 over the relatively stable level of the preceding years. Their increasing number is accompanied by a diminishing land area under control of the Royal Lao Government; Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese now occupy an estimated 60,000 sq. mi. out of the 90,000 sq. mi. of land in Laos.

As of December 31, 1971, there were over 234,000 refugees in Laos. Of this number, about 35,000 are in permanent relocation sites on the Vientiane Plain, at Seno near Savannakhet, and at Houei Nam Phak near Pakse. About 200,000 are in temporary relocation sites. Of these, 116,000 are concentrated in a fraction of their former province near the village of Ban Xon south of the Plain of Jars.

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Rice drop to a refugee village in the mountains of Laos. Over 65% of the refugees are located at over 100 sites in remote and isolated parts of Laos that cannot be reached by road.

A medical team at a rural dispensary. Refugees receive medical care at over 200 dispensaries for which USAID provides medical supplies, equipment and training for medics and practical nurses.



From its beginning as a project, Refugee Relief and Relocation has provided food, clothing, shelter and health care for refugees on the move and in relocation sites. Since 1966, when the Royal Lao Government set aside permanent relocation sites for refugees, the project has provided equipment, commodities and personnel to build dispensaries, schools, roads and wells to help the refugees reach the social and economic level of the non-refugees in the area where they are settled.

Among projects sponsored by USAID, Refugee Relief and Relocation receives first priority in the allocation of USAID resources and these resources are, in turn, allocated in order of priority: Evacuating refugees in emergency situations brought about by military action or the threat of military action, moving refugees to relocation sites, providing basic facilities at permanent relocation sites.

The assistance that USAID provides is encompassed in two broad categories designated Food Support and Rehabilitation Support. These two categories are subdivided in turn to reflect the status of the refugee groups that receive assistance:

Those refugees who require the provision of food to obtain a caloric intake sufficient to sustain health are fully dependent. They receive rice, salt, PL-480 foods and, in northwestern and central Laos, a protein supplement in the form of canned meat.

Those refugees who grow or obtain enough food to meet a substantial part of their caloric requirements are partially dependent. They receive additional

food, usually from PL-480 sources, to meet their minimal caloric requirements.

Those refugees who grow or obtain enough food to meet their caloric requirements receive rehabilitation assistance only which, at a minimum, consists of shelter materials, a water supply, medical care and help in establishing schools for children. The kind and degree of assistance varies from region to region, depending on security and need.

More than any other USAID project, Refugee Relief and Relocation depends on total USAID resources to accomplish its goals. In FY 1971, USAID provided \$17,150,000 for direct and indirect assistance to refugees. Included in this total are the contributions of USAID projects in public health, agriculture, rural public works, rural self-help, education and movement of goods and people.



A bulldozer clears land to build a road to a refugee village. During FY 1971, 308 hectares of land were cleared for relocation of refugee groups and 145 km of roads constructed to provide access to refugee villages.

School in a refugee village. Refugees build their classrooms. USAID provides portable sawmills, nails, cement, carpenter instructors and, when the school is built, textbooks.



