

INFORMAL MEMORANDUM

September 4, 1963

TO: Colonel Hoang Van Lac
Chief, Permanent Bureau, Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets

FROM: Rufus C. Phillips, Assistant Director for Rural Affairs/USOM

SUBJECT: Consolidation of the Strategic Hamlet Program in the Delta

I would like to suggest that the Interministerial Committee consider immediate adoption of an interim policy in the Delta under which, at least for the remainder of the rainy season, virtually all expansion of the Strategic Hamlet Program (building additional hamlets) would cease, and all efforts within the program would be devoted to consolidation of existing hamlets. While consolidation is taking place, the Delta program would be re-evaluated and refined. Only a few provinces, such as Kien Hoa and Kien Phong might be excluded from such a policy and even in these I believe concentrating on consolidation would be wise.

We are gravely concerned about the weakness at present of the program in the Delta. Considerable momentum has been generated but in an undertaking of this magnitude and difficulty, we believe that continual emphasis on improving what has been done and continual evaluation of the basic direction of the effort are necessary.

Briefly, under the proposed policy of consolidation, I would suggest that the following steps be taken in this order of priority:

1. Improvement of hamlet defenses to include strengthening the hamlet militia program, hamlet defense plans and provincial troop and fire support for the hamlets.
2. Strengthening the quality of the construction cadre and re-training them to assist the district chiefs in implementing the political and economic-social improvements so vital to real success of the program.
3. An intense information-psychological warfare campaign targeted at existing hamlets to raise morale and increase the spirit of resistance.
4. Hamlet economic-social development through self-help with particular emphasis on providing medical and school personnel and facilities.

A survey of the Delta indicates that the provinces where the program is the most successful already are in the process of now concentrating largely upon consolidation. However, we feel that a firm policy line concurred in by all Vietnamese Government and American officials concerned

and disseminated on the Vietnamese side is essential at this stage, if the program is to succeed in the Delta. Otherwise, I fear that the program may suffer the reverses everywhere that it is now suffering in Long An.