

BRIEFING

OFFICE FOR RURAL AFFAIRS USOM - VIETNAM

1. Fundamental Problem Addressed by Office for Rural Affairs, USOM
2. Main Activities to Achieve Objectives
3. Major Problems

The Mission of the Office for Rural Affairs is to advise and assist the Government of Vietnam, at the central and local levels, on the broad range of counterinsurgency efforts, particularly in connection with economic, social and political development. The fundamental task is to aid the GVN to develop the rural population into a Communist-resistant force, working together with its government to improve living conditions now, and to provide greater hope for the future.

The Office for Rural Affairs, in support of, and together with the GVN has planned and is implementing a variety of programs aimed at achieving these objectives. First, in pursuit of improved security and political and administrative viability, there is underway the Province Rehabilitation Program in each province which is designed to promote and strengthen the defense of the individual hamlet. In concert with the MAP, funds and material are provided to help the rural population construct protected hamlets and to organize and train the population to defend itself and work cooperatively with the government toward a better life. In addition, so-called "self-help" projects may be undertaken by individual hamlets receiving financial and commodity assistance. All these activities which are programmed in the Province Rehabilitation Agreements are planned in the province, received and approved in Saigon and implemented in the province with cash funds and other

resources delivered in advance to the province. The work is carried out under the general direction of the provincial committee which is composed of the Province Chief, the MIAG Sector Advisor and the USOM Provincial Representative. This decentralized system of program planning and execution assures a more realistic understanding of genuine local needs and a more timely and meaningful response to these needs, and may develop a closer and more harmonious relationship between the government and the rural population if correctly administered.

In addition to the Provincial Rehabilitation activities which are concerned primarily with the establishment or construction phase of the strategic hamlets, the Office for Rural Affairs assists the provinces in responding to emergencies in strategic hamlets caused by natural disasters or by VC activities. Food, clothing, agricultural tools, and other commodities as desired are shipped to disaster areas in hamlets as soon as possible in order to demonstrate to the people the desire and ability of the government to assist them in a time of urgent need. Again, this type of activity is carried on through the facilities of local administration under the direction of the provincial committee.

The Office for Rural Affairs also engages in a wide range of economic and social improvement programs. Some of these are in support of national ministry programs and include such activities as school construction and plant protection. There are also programs of regional scope in which the Office for Rural Affairs assists technical services in the provinces and national ministries by furnishing commodities, funds, and technical advice and assistance.

Examples of these projects include the hog-corn program which has achieved considerable success in the Central Lowlands, the fertilizer distribution program which has helped to improve crops in Central Vietnam, and a large scale tree planting program. There are also social and economic improvement activities of a more localized nature planned and executed within a given province for which the Office for Rural Affairs also provides support. These may include assisting the provincial public works services in road and bridge repair, supporting the provincial animal husbandry technicians in an improved poultry breeding project, or providing PL 480 foodstuffs and other commodities, exclusive of funds, to aid and encourage individual hamlets in carrying on hamlet improvement works.

An activity supplementing the efforts of the Central Government and the Provinces is in the area of Highlander relief and resettlement. In addition to funds for these purposes, quantities of food, clothing, tools and a variety of other commodities are made available, through the provincial committees, to tribal people resettling under government protection.

Another ongoing activity in which the Office for Rural Affairs is making a contribution is the Chieu Hoi program. Again funds and a variety of commodities have been allocated and are being used in the implementation of this program. In addition, the technical advice of an experienced consultant has been always available during the planning and execution of this program.

A final category of activities underway is the Provincial Development Work Plans. This refers to a provincial, social and economic development program for individual provinces supported by funds and materiel from the

central government and the AID Program. These programs are still in the planning stage as a result of the coup d'etat. To date, 5 provinces have submitted plans which had been reviewed and tentatively approved by the now abolished Farmers & Workers Affairs Sub-Committee. Individual provinces are continuing to develop plans but no central government action is being taken to approve and fund these plans until basic policies and procedures have been reviewed.

At this time, it would be well to mention the type and extent of resources available for the activities in which the Office for Rural Affairs is directly involved. Funds have been available from two sources; initially, in order to move quickly in the establishment of Strategic Hamlets, the USA purchased ten million dollars worth of piastres (735 million piastres) which was earmarked for provincial rehabilitation agreements and for some selected activities relating to the economic improvement of Strategic Hamlets and the counterinsurgency effort in general. The GVN also has earmarked funds for provincial rehabilitation activities. In addition to these piastres, which are delivered to the provinces for their use with appropriate but simplified central government control, a wide variety of commodities and materials are also available. PL 480 surplus foodstuffs are part of the resources of the provincial rehabilitation agreements and come into the country under the authority of Title II of that U.S. legislation. Some Title III of PL 480 additional foodstuffs are made available to private American organizations who are engaged in providing relief to needy people in Vietnam. Title I commodities also have been brought into the country and are sold by the

government of Vietnam in accordance with agreed-upon programs. The funds accruing from these sales are then used to carry on mutually approved programs. The bulk of the food coming in under Public Law 480 has been bulgur wheat, corn and cornmeal, cooking oil and beans. In addition, the U. S. has purchased large quantities of cement which are distributed as grants to individual rural inhabitants and to hamlets in support of the established programs or appropriate projects as the need arises. The control of this cement within the province is, as with all commodities, the responsibility of the provincial committee. In addition, a great variety of excess U. S. property has also been brought into the country for use in provincial rehabilitation. The types of items are too numerous to mention but include by way of illustration, generators, vehicles, tools and clothing. This source of U. S. surplus and salvage material is being constantly replenished.

Arrangements have also been made to use ARVN salvage clothing and equipment. Large quantities of such salvage has been and is being distributed to the rural population. One particular item of interest is the 100,000 unused tools which were found stored in warehouses having been placed there in the time of the French administration.