

Case Study

Part I

You are presented here with a description of Hai Ba Trung a village in Vietnam which is probably similar to many villages you will come to know during your periods of assignment. As you read this description, try to determine THE PROBLEMS faced by the people in this community, and by the administrative government officials and staff of government agencies; try also to identify the STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES which would contribute to amelioration or solution of the problems. There are, of course, MANY BARRIERS and ROADBLOCKS to prevent positive steps toward progress. What are they?

Tomorrow you will share your ideas with others.

Hai Ba Trung is one of 32 villages in Viet district. It is located 17.3 kilometers from the provincial capital of Nam and 30 kilometers from the Lactian frontier. Its 3210 inhabitants live in four hamlets (Pina, Coco, Papeya and Mango) which were administratively separate villages until 1960. The largest of these are the hamlets (thons) of Pina and Coco.

During the early French period each of these hamlets which were then villages had its own village council. The council consisted of an elected chief, who was the only village official responsible to district and provincial mandarins. This village chief was assisted by five councilors: a record keeper, a police councilor, a welfare agent, an information councilor and a treasurer. These members were selected by the council of notables and the positions were mostly ceremonial and honorary. The council of notables was composed of learned village elders.

The xom was the smallest administrative subdivision of each of the villages. It was a territorial grouping of a chief, usually an elder, and his assistant whose main function was to disseminate information throughout the xom. Instruction, orders, and information were relayed from the province and district officials through the village chief to the xom chief and his messenger.

The present organization of Hai Ba Trung village is a result of the amalgamation of the four former villages (now referred to as hamlets or thons) and the proclamation of Law 57-A which prescribed the official structure of village administration throughout Vietnam. After the enactment of this law, the elected councilmen were replaced by officials

appointed by the district chief.

The village council in Hai Ba Trung consists of a village chief, a police councilor, finance officer, administrative councilor and a civil status councilor, who is also responsible for information and youth. All receive salaries. In addition, Hai Ba Trung employs the services of a health commissioner and a messenger who do not enjoy councilor status.

Heading each of the four hamlets (thons) of Hai Ba Trung is a man appointed by the district chief upon recommendation of the village chief. The major function of the thon chief is the dissemination of information. He is responsible for the official administration of the thon, the organization of meetings of various kinds, security in the hamlet, and the appointment of heads of inter-family groups (lien gia).

The hamlets (thons) are subdivided into lien gia or inter-family groups. In Hai Ba Trung, as in other villages of the district, the size of the lien gia varies from 12 to 40 households. During the Viet Minh period the inter-family groups in the hamlets which now comprise Hai Ba Trung were composed of only five households, but since 1960 the LIEN GIA composition has been altered to coincide with the former XOM organization.

In Hai Ba Trung the terms lien gia and xom are both used, but in different contexts. When dealing with issues and problems of an official nature, such as the organization of work groups for community development projects or the reception and information and propaganda from the village office, the group is referred to as the LIEN GIA and the activities are organized through LIEN GIA officials (the lien gia chief, deputy chief,

information officer and security agent). However, when concerned with the mundane problems of every day life, such as minor disputes or financial or personal advice, the group is called the XOM, and the xom chief, xom elders or head of the Association of Hai Ba Trung function are unofficial advisors. On occasion, however, the separateness of functions is blurred, and sometimes the village chief issues memo to a "xom representative" rather than to the chief of the lien gia as would be expected. The banana producers of Hai Ba Trung conceive the xom as their basic territorial (as opposed to kinship) organization, and xom identification is strong.

Each xom has a name and a given number of households. For example: Mango than has 6 xoms, the largest consisting of 130 households and each of the others from 30 to 50 families. Each xom is a tightly agglomerated group of houses adjacent to another xom, all within a few minutes walking distance of each other. The close physical proximity of these units within the hamlet of Pina contrasts with the relatively great social distance. For example: People often remark, "I don't know how they do it over in that xom, but here in this xom we do it this way."

The importance of the xom varies from one hamlet to another. In Mango hamlet, where 65% of the 300 refugees live, the xom has no historical depth and is much less important than the Association of Banana Producers as the center of social economic and religious activity.

a. The Village Chief

The 56-year old village chief of Hai Ba Trung, a former elementary school teacher in Pina, spent four years in jail during the Viet Minh period. The reason he gives for his confinement is his ability to speak

French. He was appointed village chief in 1961 and attempted to resign in 1963. The then district chief did not accept his resignation. The village chief states that he will attempt to resign again after the newly appointed district chief becomes better acquainted with district problems. He says he wants to retire because of his age and ill health. Village officials have not received their allowances for seven months, but the chief claims he has been working in his job to help his country rather than gain material advantages.

b. The Police Chief

The village councilor in charge of police and security is a 31-year old coconut producer with a three-year elementary school education. From 1954 and 1956, he served in the Vietnamese army where he received the Cross of Valor. After his return to Hai Ba Trung he served as the head of a lien gia and as chief of the villages self-defense corps. In 1962 he was appointed village police chief. Like the village chief, he has been supported by his family recently because of lack of funds for monthly allowances.

c. The Finance Councilor

This official was appointed only four months ago by the new district chief. The former councilor was reportedly relieved of his duties because of his involvement in misappropriating funds. After the district chief ordered his removal, the village council and elders met to choose his successor. They named the head of the village National Revolutionary Movement, but when the district chief found this individual had been with the Viet Minh, he disapproved the appointment and selected a villager who had no experience, desire or qualification for the position. The

council members and some of the villagers had misgivings about the final appointment, but the district chief claimed that loyalty was the major consideration when making such appointments. The village council members continue to call on the services and advice of the ex-finance officer; the new councilor remains reticent and relatively voiceless in village affairs.

d. The Administrative Councilor

Before being appointed to this post, the administrative councilor had worked as the police chief (1960) and secretary to the village council (1962). He acquired his present status in 1963. He is 41 years old and has a 3-year elementary school education. Besides keeping records and vital statistics, the administrative councilor is charged with the training and propaganda functions of the National Revolutionary Movement.

e. The Health Commissioner

The village health worker, now 27 years old, returned to Hai Ba Trung in 1961 after a period of four years in service in the Vietnamese Army. He has only two years of elementary schooling before he went to the rice paddy full time to help support his widowed mother and his younger brothers and sisters.

Upon discharge from the army he took a one-month course from village health workers which was offered in Nam. He says he was in the hospital for six weeks while he was in the Army and that he was so impressed by the illness and suffering that he saw and the wonderful things the hospital staff did for sick patients that he decided he wanted to be a health worker so he could bring some medical care to his fellow

villagers. It was from one of the doctors he met while he was in the hospital that he learned about the course for village health workers.

The health dispensary for Hai Ba Trung was built by members of the Association of Banana Producers and the health commissioner and is located in a small room attached to the commissioner's home which is in Coco Thon. The commissioner's medical equipment and supplies consist of a thermometer, needles and slides for making blood samples, aspirin, malaria drugs, sterile cotton and gauze, and ointments for eye infections and for burns. During the past year it has been difficult for the health commissioner to keep enough supplies on hand. Because the Viet Cong has been active in the area, the district health worker is no longer able to visit Hai Ba Trung every two months to consult with the commissioner and to replenish the stock of supplies and drugs in the local dispensary.

The nearest hospital is in Nam, a distance of 17.3 kilometers from Hai Ba Trung.

Economic Situation

Most of the funds needed to defray village expenses are collected locally. Surcharges on rice fields, coconut groves, land taxes and contributions by village residents constitute the major village resources. In Hai Ba Trung, however, officials have had difficulty in collecting these revenues, thus creating a deficit in income which has forced the curtailment of allowances to the members of the village council.

Way of Life

Whereas the villager in Hai Ba Trung, in his everyday economic, religious and management activities, participates through such groups as the lien gia or xom, it is his wide circle of relatives and clan

members with whom he interacts, that influence the more personal aspects of his life and the circumstances surrounding life crises such as birth, marriage, and natural disaster. Marriage choice, ascribed social status, occupation, inheritance, residence and the afterlife are all related to the system of kinship. As in other parts of Vietnam, this system is undergoing change, mainly due to such external influences as war, political turmoil and modernization. Literacy is spreading, schools are being built, some health facilities are being introduced, army recruitment and the civil guard have drawn people out of the villages, and there is more interaction and communication between villages.

The changes that have taken place in these areas in Hai Ba Trung, however, appear to be changes only in emphasis or in the degree of adherence to certain accepted principles in relation to old established institutions.

The people of Hai Ba Trung are born in the village, grow up there, marry another Hai Ba Trung resident, and a majority die at the place of their birth. Life is hard and monotonous, the only excitement being an occasional trip to the provincial capital for a movie or a visit to the Banana Producers' Cooperative, located in Viet Village (district headquarters), some 11 kilometers distant.

It is said that a couple reaches adulthood at marriage. It is then that the never ending quest for food and other manifestations of a decent livelihood begin. Children are born and the couple grows old. Traditional Vietnamese celebrations at ages 60 or 70 are not held because, the villagers say, the Hai Ba Trung people are too poor. Finally, old people fall ill and turn to native medicines and prayer for the elimination of the evil spirits.

Birth control and the spacing of babies are of little concern to the mothers of Hai Ba Trung. Children are considered to be "gifts of the gods" which cannot be refused. Although some complaints are voiced about too many children, the general attitude of the villager, despite the hard life, is that it is better to have many children than none at all. Furthermore, since the infant mortality rate is high and childhood diseases are often fatal because of the lack of medical knowledge and facilities, a woman must give birth to several children to be sure one will survive.

Life expectancy is not high, and despite the large number of pregnancies, the rate of annual population increase is low. Almost half of the population of Hai Ba Trung -- 1504 out of a total of 3210 -- is under 17 years of age.

Education

The people of Hai Ba Trung place little importance on formal education. In recent years, however, they have wanted their children trained to read and write Vietnamese. Because of poor school facilities, lack of competent teachers, and most important, because of the need for youth to begin earning a living at an early age, formal education exceeding one or two years is deemed unnecessary. School enrollment is not high and absenteeism is prevalent.

Formal education is provided in the thon or hamlet schools. There are six elementary schools in the village, two in Pina hamlet, two in Coco, and one each in Mango and Papaya.

Of the six, four are public 3-year schools, one a semipublic and one a private school. The semipublic and private schools offer only a 2-year course. The public schools are controlled and financed by the village council.

The semipublic school was built by the Mango thon residents five years ago. The teacher is a 29-year old native of the thon who has taught at the school since it was inaugurated. He was appointed by the village council and receives \$1,000 per month, \$700 from the village council and \$300 from student fees. As with other local officials, he has not received the portion of his pay which comes from the village.

budget for several months. He, his wife and their three children depend upon the wife's earnings from a small shop. This teacher has a primary education (five years), enough to qualify him to teach the first and second grades. The semipublic school is under the supervision of the principal of one of the Hai Ba Trung village public primary schools located in Pina hamlet (thon). The teacher meets twice monthly with the principal and all other than teachers for political education and training. He says that there are 250 school-age children in his hamlet, 85 of whom are enrolled in his school. Two thirds are boys, ranging in ages from 6 to 11. Schools hours are from 8:30 to 11:00 a.m. and from 2:30 to 5:00 p.m. The school is closed on Thursdays and Sundays and classes meet only in the mornings or Saturday.

The private school, located in Coco hamlet, is operated by a resident who received two years of secondary education. She supports her husband who remains home with the children. Fees vary from 20 piastres (one piastre equals approximately one U.S. cent) to 30 piastres per student per month and the enrollment, at most, is 80 students in three classes, depending on the season. The private school teacher's average monthly income is about 1500 piastres. This, of course, depends upon student fees which sometimes come in installments or not at all. The teacher confesses that fee collection is a problem, but she says nothing to parents for fear of antagonizing them and having the children taken out of school altogether. She holds classes in her home from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. without a break.

The literacy classes conducted at night for adults no longer exist because of the shortage of funds for supplies and for school equipment. Due to the lack of money in the Hai Ba Trung budget, the teachers were expected to and did volunteer their services. The village chief cannot understand why the teachers felt they could not continue to teach adults simply because they did not have supplies. He says that it costs practically nothing to learn Vietnamese. Paper and pencils are expensive, but these are luxuries. The fastest and cheapest way to learn the national language is to substitute a stick for a pencil and sand for paper.

Communications

There are no telephones in Hai Ba Trung. Messages to the hamlet (thon) chiefs from the village chief are conveyed by runners.

The village chief has a 2-way radio, provided by USOM's Public Safety Division which he obtained from the district chief. Only two families in Hai Ba Trung have radios; both sets are old and frequently inoperative because of battery failure.

There is a road from Hai Ba Trung to Nam (Provincial capital) which is open for jeeps at any time and for trucks a good part of the year. There are only paths leading out from the village to the frontier and to the south. These are sometimes passable for Lambrettas but are used mostly for bicycle and foot traffic. Some self defense corpsmen own their own bicycles as do approximately 20 other villagers.

Hai Ba Trung has been supplied one jeep and two Lambrettas by USOM. These vehicles are used chiefly for official business by occasionally help haul produce to Nam and the Banana Cooperative in Viet.

About eight months ago the Association of Banana Producers acquired a truck, which makes two deliveries a week to Viet. Local shopkeepers have arranged for the drivers of the truck to pick up supplies such as kerosene, matches, salt, sugar, when they make trips to Viet or to Nam.

Hai Ba Trung has a mimeographed weekly which is published locally. It carries news of local interest as well as information about provincial and national activities. The village civil status councilor is responsible for this publication and serves as its editor. He is very proud of the new mimeograph machine which carries the symbol of the clasped hands of USOM.

Religious Beliefs and Ceremonies

Religion and associated beliefs and ceremonies are an integral part of everyday life in Hai Ba Trung. The majority of the villagers live in a world of natural phenomena--birth, death, sickness, natural disaster; the average villager exists from day to day, continually fighting starvation and death. His world is filled with spirits, ghosts, and gods, both evil and ~~benign~~, who influence the course of natural events and survival itself. The villager's home contains an elaborate Buddhist altar in its center; the villager venerates his ancestors and worships the Goddess of the Five Elements--metal, wood, fire, water and earth. These gods are called "natural gods" to distinguish them from devils and evil spirits whose actions are entirely of a wicked nature. Each hamlet (thon) in Hai Ba Trung has a shrine for the worship of the "natural gods" where annual ceremonies are held.

All important hamlet-wide ceremonies are held in the thon dinh which is a gathering place for the entire community. Each thon has

its own cult committee composed of five village elders who have high prestige in the hamlet. Before a celebration in the dinh, the elders call together members of the xom or lien gia to decide the date of the ceremony and the amount each family should contribute. The most important dinh ceremony of the year is Cau An in the first lunar month. Its purpose is to call on the guardian spirit of the village to bring peace and prosperity. Another ceremony is the Autumn Festival, celebrated in the eighth lunar month.

There is a close relationship in Hai Ba Trung between the living and the dead. The dead--xom, clan and village founders, and ancestors of various degrees--are venerated throughout the year; their protection and guidance is sought; they are respected through ritual and feared if they have been neglected or improperly treated.

A leader of the Catholic group in Hai Ba Trung estimates that there are 32 families, or about 141 Catholics in Hai Ba Trung. Generally, village elders and notables express disdain for Catholicism due to their interest in preserving their conception of traditional customs and values.

Another form of "individual belief" which exists in Hai Ba Trung, whether considered religious or not, is the taboo. These taboos are concerned mostly with menstruation, childbirth and sickness. For example, women are not allowed to participate in rituals during their periods. During pregnancy a woman must avoid certain foods. Chicken may cause a kind of skin disease, and guava and banana may cause the child to suffer from a furuncular condition and constipation. For the first three or four days after childbirth, a Hai Ba Trung mother eats

only rice with salt and pepper. After giving birth a woman must be confined for at least ten days, but the length of confinement varies according to financial status. The more wealthy women, who do not have to work, may remain in bed for as long as one month.

Babies are delivered at home or at the maternity clinic in Viet. Most of the village women prefer a local midwife to the clinic, partly because the cost is less.

There are a number of taboos related to sickness. The causes of the most common illnesses in Hai Ba Trung are thought to be the wind, the sun and the water. A person with any of the illnesses ascribed to these causes is forbidden to bathe for fear of lengthening and aggravating the disease. Rice soup is the major food eaten during illness.

Refugees

As mentioned earlier there are some 300 refugees in Hai Ba Trung. About 30% of them came from North Vietnam in 1954. The remainder, who are Montagnards (Mois in Vietnamese) and chiefly from the Jarai tribal group, began moving into Hai Ba Trung about 1959 when the Viet Cong sacked their tribal villages. Most of the latter group arrived in 1960, but every month or so two or three new families seek resettlement in Hai Ba Trung.

The process of assimilation is slow. Those who came from North Vietnam arrived ten years ago, but the old-timers in Hai Ba Trung still think of them as foreigners. The Montagnard is looked down upon, not only by the old-timers, but by the refugees from North Vietnam as well.

Security

Administration, groups and associations, economic activity and religious affairs--in short, all activities in Hai Ba Trung--are intimately affected by the security problem. Health, education and agricultural authorities confine their work to the provincial and district seats, Nam and Viet, rather than risk operating away from areas of military or police protection. The district information agent, for example, formerly visited Hai Ba Trung at least once each month, organizing the National Revolutionary Movement and dispersing information and propaganda. Today, like the district health worker, his visits are infrequent and he does not maintain a regular schedule.

While Hai Ba Trung itself has not experienced a serious Viet Cong attack for more than a year, there are major areas of insecurity toward the Lactian frontier and occasionally in areas between Hai Ba Trung.

According to the provincial military affairs officer, 81 Viet Cong have been killed and 2 taken prisoner in Viet District during the past month.

A little over a year ago the hamlets of Mango and Papaya were the targets of several raids during a one-month period. Property damage was extensive and at least 37 villagers were killed. Seven other disappeared and it is presumed they are dead.

The police chief states that there are Viet Cong sympathizers in all four hamlets (thons) and he suspects that there are members of the Viet Cong living in Hai Ba Trung. Some residents regard the Viet Cong not so much as terrorists as local patriots who do not like the Government of Vietnam. One or two local residents of great

leadership skill are suspected of being either active Viet Cong or strong sympathizers. Also, a few people receive food believed to come from the Viet Cong.

The sons of at least 30 village families left Hai Ba Trung long ago to join the Viet Cong. It is not known whether members of their families are in sympathy with the "cause" but it is realized that they are worried about these sons and brothers and are reluctant to participate in security measures or be identified with U.S. A.I.D. which might turn out to be injurious to loved ones.

The chief functions of the village police chief are the protection of villagers' lives and properties and the maintenance of order and security. He reports all information on Viet Cong subversive activities to the district chief. He is assisted in his duties by the village self-defense corps and has 32 men and 2 squad chiefs at his disposal.

All self-defense corpsmen are volunteers. Their job is to execute the police chief's orders. They man the outposts; guard public buildings and bridges; escort village officials in unsafe areas, especially the finance officer and his tax collection trips; and patrol the village area under the command of the police chief. The patrol area covers all roads, rice paddies, banana groves, swamps, jungle and waterways.

There are 26 fixed posts or check points of the night watch manned by the Republican Youth. Every villager from 18 to 35 years of age is compulsorily enlisted in this organization. Their sole weapons are 5-foot bamboo poles and 2-meter lengths of rope.

Agricultural practices

Agricultural practices in the Hai Ba Trung area are not highly

developed although the banana producers have been experimenting with new methods and have realized an increase in their returns. Although bananas are the principal source of income for the villagers, most families also grow some rice. Since the farmers produce only one crop of rice per year, there is seldom enough produced to satisfy the needs of Hai Ba Trung.

There are probably two major reasons why irrigation and thus double cropping are not practiced in this area:

- (1) Irrigation systems are tremendously complicated affairs in terms of human relationships.
- (2) Possibly a more important factor bearing on this subject is the lack of incentives for higher production. Survival, not production, seems to be the major preoccupation. In Hai Ba Trung the people are not starving. On the contrary, a number of tenants and small land owners state that they are relatively prosperous because the bananas they grow are much sought after in both Viet and Nam.

A number of garden crops are raised for home consumption and it is a rare family that does not boast of two or more pigs.

Aspirations and the Future

Some people of Hai Ba Trung especially youth look to Saigon as a kind of paradise. Almost all have a desire to visit the capital of the country, either for pleasure or for employment. So far there has been no apparent pattern of migration from Hai Ba Trung to Saigon. However, if the security situation worsens or if the economic situation deteriorates it can be expected that the wish to move may be fulfilled

for some of the villagers.

When asked about change and the future, most villagers talk about matters limited to their own specific fields of interest. School teachers want better school rooms and more books; the village tailor hopes for a greater variety of cloth and more awareness of new fashions in clothing; parents long for better marriages for their children; an elder in charge of certain village ceremonies wants the rituals simplified to reduce costs. In short, the people of Hai Ba Trung are hopeful of gradual life improvement and security.

There is widespread belief that change should or does come from outside the village, that the people of Hai Ba Trung cannot control their own destiny. As one man sums it up, "We ought to have community development projects based on our own needs and desires, but this can only be done with the help of officials from the district or province who probably do not share our opinions. We do not have the money to carry out projects, so we have to listen to outside ideas."