

John T. Dorsey Jr.

REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PROPOSED FIELD ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMISSARIAT FOR REFUGEES OF SEPTEMBER 20, 1955

**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Vietnam Technical Assistance Project
Saigon, Vietnam**

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**WESLEY R. FISHEL
Chief Advisor**

**WALTER W. MODE
Chief, Field Administration
Project**

**ROLAND HANEY
Field Advisor**

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Walter W. MODE
Chief, Field Administration Project

Roland Haney
Field Advisor

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Vietnam Advisory Team
Saigon, Vietnam

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PREFACE

With the agreement and full cooperation of the Commissariat-General for Refugees (COMIGAL or the Refugee Commission), our Team undertook a review of field organization six months after submitting our report of September 20, 1955. In this study we have tried to measure the degree of acceptance which has been accorded in practice to those suggestions. At the outset the MSU Team would like to underscore the fact that those proposals for a field organization were not exclusively "ours" by origin. Instead they represent in large measure the ideas of refugee leaders in the villages, provincial officials, and COMIGAL staff-members, as revealed in interviews and conversations.

One of the two principal sources of information for this review has been a series of visits to field offices by a joint committee of "trouble-shooters" representing COMIGAL, USOM, AND MSU. During these visits, which began on March 22, 1956, the field representatives of COMIGAL have been invited to introduce their problems for general discussion. The second principal source has been a series of interviews in Saigon and in the provinces which members of the MSU Team have conducted with COMIGAL field staff. Here we based the interviews upon a prepared questionnaire, one for each of the positions in the COMIGAL field office. Avoiding any duplication of visits, we had arrived at nearly complete coverage by June 10, 1956. The research phase ended with informal interviews and conversations at the central services of COMIGAL during which we tried to fill the gaps in our information, which became apparent only after the field trips.

The recommendations contained in the report of September 20, 1955 were listed under two headings: Organizational Suggestions, with six sub-headings, and Procedural Suggestions, with seven sub-headings. In Part I of this review we shall consider the impact of those proposals, and in the same order. In Part II we shall offer some ideas concerning operations in the future.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our report of September 20, 1955 listed three basic assumptions underlying the proposals for a field organization.

1. The temporary nature of COMIGAL. This assumption is still valid; and it raises questions for the future, which will be considered in Part II.
2. The use of projects for group resettlement of refugees. This assumption too is still valid. This chosen instrument has greatly influenced administration of the resettlement program in the field; for until projects had received final approval, and until funds were released for execution, there was no practical necessity to build a field organization.
3. Acceptance and implementation of the recommendations concerning reorganization of the central services at COMIGAL, as listed in our report of August 6, 1955. The report emphasized the need for decentralization of activities. Broadly speaking, this assumption has been confirmed by events. See our review of March 27, 1956.

The present review has revealed substantial implementation of the proposals for a field organization. Due to a recent change, however, it is necessary for us to reserve any opinion concerning the new administrative machinery for project execution. This point of difficulty will be examined in Part I.

Our frequent contacts and continuing association with the Refugee Commission over a period of nearly a year have made it possible for us to observe progress in resettlement at close range. We have been impressed by the calibre of leadership which has carried the program forward to a stage where the goal is now in view, despite the scope and complexity of the operation. The MSU Team is happy to have had the opportunity to work alongside COMIGAL and USOM in this challenging cause.

REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUGGESTIONS

1. The Refugee Commission Field Officer

A. Following our suggestion the Commissariat has established a field representative under the name of "Provincial Delegate" in those areas where the problem of resettlement is acute, including the six provinces which we named: Biên-Hòa, Gia-Dinh, Tây-Ninh, Mỹ-Tho, Cholon, Bình-Thuận. Approximately two-thirds of the refugees are now located there.

B. Administrative relationships and communications linking the Provincial Delegate and his staff with the permanent provincial authorities, on the one hand, and with the Refugee Commission, on the other, reflect the sum of our suggestions, after allowance is made for variations in the environment.

(1). We found that a Provincial Committee for Refugees headed by the Chief of Province, has been created in every province where there is a field office; but it seldom meets -- perhaps only once a month or at irregular intervals -- in deference to the crowded schedules of the provincial authorities. Here only the form of our proposal has been executed. However, it appears that the substance of coordination has been assured by other means.

In general the Province Chiefs have authorized direct communication between the COMIGAL delegate and the chiefs of the technical services: public works, health, agriculture, etc. In many cases a day-to-day informal contact of that kind will forestall the need for creating a forum in which the COMIGAL field officer can regularly discuss the problems of resettlement with leaders in the permanent provincial administration.

We suggest however that the value of the Provincial Committee, as a forum for coordinating refugee resettlement with long-term provincial planning, will become increasingly evident with the general shift from project planning to project execution. We were encouraged to find an unqualified acceptance,

of the role which the Provincial Committee can play in determining when a refugee village is ready for integration.

(2). Early in December 1955 the Commissioner-General invited the Province Chiefs concerned to a meeting in Saigon during which members of the MSU Team explained the recommendations for a field organization. The Province Chiefs agreed to the establishment of the field offices and also agreed to limit their fiscal control, in general, to a post-audit. At the end of May 1956 the Commissioner-General convened the first in a series of monthly meetings with his Provincial Delegates to discuss problems and developments of general interest.

C. The Report specified six functions and responsibilities, among others, for the Provincial Delegate. The last one concerned classification of refugee villages as ordinary villages integrated into the life of the province; it has not yet been put to the test. It appears however that the Provincial Delegate has in practice been charged with the first four: development of projects, processing the proposed projects, serving as executive secretary to the Provincial Committee, and scheduling the work of survey teams.

(1). The fifth item in this list of proposed functions and responsibilities for the Field Officer concerns expenditure of funds and maintenance of records in project execution. A recent change in the funding procedure has created a doubt whether the Field Officer will be able to exercise an administrative control commensurate with this responsibility. This is the point of difficulty which was noted in the Summary of Findings.

On May 22, 1956, the Department of Finance and USOM proposed a new funding procedure to the Commissioner-General with the purpose of expediting the flow of funds to approved projects and simplifying the accounting function. Certainly, funding procedures do not enter into the scope of this study unless administration is directly affected. We have noted that the proposed system would grant to an elected governmental body, the

Village Administrative Committee, control of expenditures within the budget. Necessarily this Committee would decide upon the plan of action for executing the project. This plan was amended to limit the area of decision for which the Village Administrative Committee would be responsible and also to devise additional controls against waste and misapplication of public funds. Here the Provincial Delegate would play an important role. As amended the new funding procedure went into effect on June 16, 1956. It is too early to estimate whether the Provincial Delegate's effectiveness has suffered from this partial transfer of functions to the Village Administrative Committee. In principle, a committee is not well suited to the job of execution; for responsibility is diffused.

2. Field Office.

Field Offices, operating under the direct control of the Provincial Delegate, have been established in substantial conformity with our suggestions. The planning division is represented by a Planning Officer; and the implementation division is represented by one or more Center Chiefs, following a geographical grouping developed by USOM. As the basic function of a Center Chief is project execution, his position is challenged even more directly than the position of the Provincial Delegate by the grant of limited fiscal autonomy to the Village Administrative Committee. In general the field offices have not been large enough to call for a separate administrative services section, but the accounting function has always been present.

The Regisseur-Comptable or agent accountant has been a key figure in project implementation. Until he was named, no money could be spent. Under the new funding system, the Regisseur-Comptable will be replaced by a Cashier and various sub-Cashiers, who disburse funds on the authorization of the Village Administrative Committee.

Unavailability of technicians in sufficient numbers has unfortunately prevented the establishment of a pool of technicians at the field offices

or at the Commissariat.

3. Survey Team.

Having in mind the apparent unavailability of technical personnel, we are happy to congratulate the Commissariat and its field staff upon their success in preparing a sufficient number of acceptable projects to cover the recognized refugee villages. We have found several instances where the Provincial Delegate or the Planning Officer conducted the survey himself with the assistance, as available, of the provincial technical services. The results appear to justify our suggestion that the survey team could consist of persons of general competence rather than technicians. It would have been easy to do nothing and then to blame the impasse in project planning upon a shortage of technical personnel. Fortunately, the Commissariat's field personnel have demonstrated skill and ingenuity in overcoming that handicap.

4. Village Self-Help.

In general, the village administrative committees have functioned as self-help committees by assisting survey teams in the development of projects. Now, with the adoption of a new funding system, this Committee will become the focus for project execution as well. Wherever ultimate responsibility may be placed, in the legal sense, the day-to-day decisions as to what is to be done next will be made at the village level; and the success of these projects for resettlement will largely depend upon the good sense and dedicated service of the elected committee-members to their fellow-refugees.

5. The Situation in Other Provinces.

The Commissariat has established field offices in several provinces besides the six already named:

- a. In South Viet-Nam-- Thu-Dau-Mt, Baria and Cap St. Jacques, Soc-Trng and Cn-Th and Bac-Li, and at the Cai-Sn project in Long-Xuyen and Rach-Gia.
- b. In the PMS-- Ban-Me-Thu, Haut Donnai and Dalat, and at the La-Nga Project in the Haut Donnai. The office of the COMIGAL

Regional Delegate in Dalat has recently been abolished, following the recommendation in the report.

c. In Central Viet-Nam — Khanh-Hoa. The office of the COMIGAL Regional Delegate in Hue has also been abolished.

In provinces where no COMIGAL field office has been established, the Bureau of Refugee Affairs, which is a part of the provincial administration, has assisted the Village Administrative Committees in developing projects. Here the number of refugees involved is considerably smaller.

The three projects at Cai-Sân, Ban-Me-Thuôt, and La-Nga are designed to exploit untouched or abandoned tracts. They offer the possibility of relocating and rehabilitating thousands of refugees who are now located in unsatisfactory sites, as is often the case in the six provinces. The Commissariat merits high praise for assigning a high priority to these development projects. One of the amendments to the new funding procedure exempted these three projects outright, and also exempted new refugee settlements temporarily from application of the new system based on the Village Administrative Committee.

6. Responsibilities of the Commissariat in Saigon.

a) Although the Commissariat accepted in principle the role of "roving coordinators" or "roving expeditors" to work in the field from a base at COMIGAL and to break bottlenecks in project planning and project execution, none have been appointed as yet. Up to now, the joint COMIGAL-USOM-MSU roving team of "trouble-shooters" has been able to give some service of this kind. With the growing number of approved projects, however, the need for full-time service in the field will become more and more pressing. We suggest that now is the time for careful definition of the Coordinator's job, utilizing the experience of recent months in project execution, and for prompt appointment of vigorous candidates.

b) We have not found a systematic and continuing effort at the Commissariat to estimate the capacity of markets to absorb additional production from refugee sources and consciously to guide production of crops and goods away from uneconomic channels toward more profitable undertakings. As a

result, it is not surprising that our interviews in the field revealed marketing problems in some provinces. On the other hand it is distinctly possible that the refugees would have ignored, in practice, good technical advice from COMIGAL in favor of continuing traditional handicrafts or planting the usual crops. While external subsidies are available, the need to adjust production to suit market conditions is temporarily disguised.

REVIEW OF PROCEDURAL SUGGESTIONS

1. The Use of Specific Schedules.

a) The Commissariat has not adopted routing slips specifying dates of action as a technique for expediting the flow of work. However, records available to us indicate, on the basis of random sampling, that a spread of only 7-12 days intervened between the arrival in Saigon of a draft project from a field office and submission of the proposal to USOM. The Planning Division at COMIGAL used the interval to review the project and, if necessary, to scale down requests so as to meet the established standards. We have had no way of measuring whether the work of survey teams in developing projects would have been expedited by the adoption of specific schedules.

b) On the side of project execution, it appears that the stage of finding and nominating a Regisseur-Comptable who would be acceptable professionally to the Department of Finance used to require an average of 30 days. In the new funding system this position has been down-graded to that of a Cashier, a step which should eliminate this major source of delay.

2. Flexibility.

The Commissariat has demonstrated a commendable flexibility in the use of available personnel. In regard to central office staff this point is developed in sub-heading No. 6: Personnel Reassignment. In some cases administrators and technicians who were already working at province headquarters have been assigned or made temporarily available to the field offices. We did not find any instances of "empire-building" or amassing superfluous personnel in the field offices.

Flexibility should be subordinate to efficiency. In principle the MSU Team recommends that employment of part-time personnel be kept to a minimum,

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especially in the use of functionaries who have concurrently a full-time appointment in a permanent department or at province headquarters. Although those officials can usually offer professional competence, there is a great danger that they would resolve all conflicts in allotting their time and effort in favor of the career appointment to the disadvantage of the temporary agency.

3. Emphasis on Field Activities.

In general we found an encouraging readiness on the part of COMIGAL field staff to leave their desks at province headquarters and to work directly with the refugees on frequent visits to their villages. We have already called attention in this paper to some of the results of this constructive attitude.

4. Emphasis on Channels.

A greater emphasis on the use of channels of communications has become possible with decentralization of COMIGAL activities. Now that the bulk of administrative and fiscal decisions are made in the field, refugee leaders are far less likely to depart from channels and carry a problem directly to Saigon. In recent visits to the Refugee Commission we have noticed that the waiting rooms are much less crowded than they were last Autumn. An official at COMIGAL summed up the changed situation by referring dryly to the proverbial attraction of sugar for flies.

5. Records and Inspection.

The Inspector-General from COMIGAL has always had access to records maintained in the villages and in the field offices. Under the new funding system, those records and receipts which indicate project execution at the village level will remain in the custody of the Village Administrative Committee. Only a summary, monthly progress report will be sent forward from this Committee to provincial headquarters, COMIGAL and USOM. It will therefore become increasingly important for the Inspector-General to have sufficient personnel to visit the refugee villages and centers frequently. Mixed inspection teams from COMIGAL and USOM will measure disbursements against actual achievements. The USOM Field Representative, the Roving Coordinator, and

the Provincial Delegate or his staff will need access to records in the villages and centers. In order for these various controls to operate effectively and without mutual interference, it will be necessary for the inspectors to notify the Provincial Delegate in advance of their visits and to observe strictly the limitations of their sphere of interest. If the Chief of Province should decide to intervene in the execution of a project, we assume that he would utilize the field office to the fullest extent.

6. Personnel Reassignment.

Our review of March 27, 1956 indicated a marked decrease in central office staff between August 1955 and March 1956 along with a still greater increase in field staff. During April 1956 total COMIGAL personnel increased from 1314 to 1442 with the bulk of the additional staff going to the field offices. The pertinent statistics did not vary appreciably in May, 1956.

During the current month (June 1956) the Commissariat has renewed its efforts to decrease central office staff by offering field assignments as Cashiers and sub-Cashiers to qualified personnel. We recognize the great difficulties which the Commissariat faces in trying to persuade competent personnel to accept a temporary field assignment which is less agreeable than a career position in one of the permanent departments. Those employees and officials of COMIGAL who willingly accept a job in the field from considerations of professional conscience and patriotism should not be forgotten when resettlement is completed.

We applaud the Commissioner General's resolution to view failure to report to a field assignment on the part of central office staff as a voluntary resignation; and as a supplementary recruiting measure. We suggest that the Commissariat might consult the Department of Labor to try to locate acceptable staff who are now unemployed.

7. Putting Recommendations in to Effect.

From the date that our report on field organization was submitted, September 20, 1955, we have been ready and available to discuss these suggestions and to try to clear up any ambiguities in the report. A staff-member has been available full-time to participate in implementation efforts. In

the future we shall try to make a staff-member available upon request to assist in resolving specific problems that arise during the final period of the life of the Refugee Commission. The MSU Team did not expect absolute acceptance of the proposals in principle, nor did we anticipate a strict and inflexible application in practice. We are highly gratified that the Commissioner-General has built a field service which corresponds functionally, although not literally, to the kind of organization envisaged in the report of September 20, 1955.

PART II

"A LOOK TO THE FUTURE"

The Refugee Commission and USOM anticipate that projects covering virtually all refugees who fall within the purview of COMIGAL will be approved by June 30, 1956. The Commissariat intends to take a new and complete census in the recognized villages as soon as possible. The current revised estimate of the total number is 628,000, a number which does not take account of soldiers' families or those refugees who do not live with a group of other refugees. Thus, COMIGAL will shortly enter upon a new and concluding phase of its existence, execution of approximately one hundred and forty projects for group resettlement.

The MSU Group believes that planning for the orderly dissolution of COMIGAL should begin immediately. The Directorate of Planning is qualified to assume this task on the ground of experience, and the approaching end of the phase of project-planning and reviewing should release the needed personnel. Flexibility should be stressed; for the stage of project execution will be completed sooner in some provinces than in others. Individual offices in the field and sections at headquarters in Saigon should be closed as their respective tasks are completed.

A. TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS

In order to ensure a smooth transfer of services, the operational divisions at COMIGAL should meet with the interested permanent agencies to arrange details of the overall plan. For example, the Medical-Social Service in the Directorate of Resettlement should consult the Department of

Social action and Health, and the Information Service should establish contact with the Department of Information. The Director of Cabinet or his representative could act as chairman of these meetings so as to maintain coordination on behalf of the Commissioner-General. We are pleased that the Refugee Commission has anticipated this suggestion in regard to transfer of the medical services.

B. CUSTODY AND USE OF RECORDS

The story of COMIGAL is far too valuable as an historical record and as a practical guide to governmental action in meeting large-scale emergencies for the files to be thrown into crates and stored in some corner of a warehouse. Record material pertaining to unfinished business should be extracted from the files and transferred to the permanent agency concerned. Prior to dissolution of COMIGAL, each of the central services and field offices should scan its files and destroy superfluous copies of documents and any material which has lost its significance. The Planning Group should recommend a policy to the Commissioner-General for transfer and custody of the files. We suggest, as one possibility for their consideration, that records of field offices could go to the provincial administration, records of COMIGAL'S regional delegations in Hué and Dalat could temporarily go to the Government Delegations there pending dissolution of those offices, and that records of the central services could be deposited in the national archives. Within the limitations imposed by our work with other agencies, we would be happy to advise the Planning Group in establishing standards and procedures for classifying and transferring the files. In any case, the files should be made available for inspection, upon request, by interested governmental agencies, including the National Institute of Administration.

C. ASSIGNING PERSONNEL TO OTHER AGENCIES

Earlier in this paper we indicated the belief that devoted service to a temporary agency such as the Refugee Commission creates a reciprocal obligation on the part of government to try to place qualified personnel in the permanent departments. In addition to ethical considerations, such a policy would be grounded upon the need to maintain morale and a high standard of

performance within the organization during the final phase of operations.

With the agreement of the Fonction Publique, COMIGAL should try to transfer, without a break in service, a sufficient number of qualified personnel to enable the operating agencies to meet an increased workload. Regulations should be interpreted or formally amended to permit temporary employees who have served COMIGAL with distinction to enter the permanent ranks of the Civil Service. The incorporation of over 625,000 refugees into the general population will increase demands upon national programs such as health, information, education, public works, and agriculture. It is assumed that the possibility of an assignment in one of these agencies would be greater at the provincial and local echelons than at headquarters in Saigon.

As the social and political unit for integrating the bulk of the refugees into the normal life of the country will be the village, the administrative tasks of the District Chiefs and Province Chiefs will probably grow after COMIGAL'S dissolution. Here too the possibility exists that qualified personnel could find new assignments. Both from the standpoint of immediate availability of jobs and the long-term impact of national programs, COMIGAL should continue to urge upon its personnel the importance of assignments in the field away from Saigon.

D. WHEN COMIGAL IS DISSOLVED.

With the completion of the phase of project execution, it is expected that all or nearly all of the refugee villages will be self-supporting and ready for integration. After receiving legal recognition as self-administering political units, these villages and their inhabitants will enter into the planning and responsibilities of the provincial administration on exactly the same basis as the long-established villages of the district.

As the representative of the central government, the Province Chief would plan and coordinate a limited program of supplementary assistance in case any of the refugee villages fails to reach a level of self-support at the time the funds allocated to that project are exhausted. It is expected that the province chief would meet such a problem by re-allocating

the technical skills, manpower, and material which the existing budget places under his control. Only if local resources prove insufficient should he request a special grant from the national treasury.

As the phase of project execution draws to a close, the Refugee Commission will be able to judge whether a major relocation effort is still necessary, exceeding the planned capacities of Cai-San, La-Nga, and Ban-Me-Thuot. The MSU team would then stand ready to advise COMIGAL in ways to meet that unlikely contingency. We trust that present plans will prove sufficient to complete the economic and social integration of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled from the north of Viet-Nam in 1954 and 1955.