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RURAL
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AN
AGROVILLE
IN
DEVELOPMENT

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Preface to the Vietnam Studies Publications

In 1955 Michigan State University began a program of technical assistance to the Government of South Vietnam, supported by a contract with the predecessor agency of the United States Agency for International Development. Through this program Michigan State University provided technical advisors in the broad field of public administration, including police administration. In recent years, most of this advisory service has been devoted to strengthening the teaching, in-service training, and research programs of the National Institute of Administration, an agency in Saigon created by the Vietnamese Government to strengthen the public service generally.

Members of the Michigan State University group have included specialists in the field of public administration, police administration, economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and other special fields. In the course of over seven years of technical cooperation in Vietnam, members of the Michigan State University group have contributed a large number of surveys and studies of various types, training documents, and reports containing recommendations on various administrative problems.

This document is one of many prepared in Vietnam as a part of the work of the Michigan State University group. It was written for a specific purpose and under particular circumstances and should be read with these qualifications in mind. It is being reproduced and made available at this time for the use of the Agency for International Development, and is not intended for general circulation. We suggest that this study be used with the understanding that additional materials are available from the earlier MSUG studies which appeared in mimeographed form, and that it fits into the broad context of a technical assistance program as part of the U. S. foreign aid program in Vietnam.

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Foreword

A plan for large-scale rural resettlement in Vietnam—the development of agrovilles—was announced in 1959 and implemented with urgency in the subsequent two years. Though the plan was abandoned in 1961, many elements of it have been incorporated into the strategic hamlet plan inaugurated in late 1961. The agrovillage program will be examined here with a view to revealing problems of rural resettlement in Vietnam, problems still basic today in the construction of strategic hamlets.

This article will relate the agrovillage program to earlier plans for resettlement. It will review the Vietnamese government's basic intention at the time: an ambitious scheme to construct agrovilles throughout the entire delta region of South Vietnam. Finally, it will describe, through a case study of the agrovillage developed at Tan Luoc, the process of construction of a typical agrovillage.

The author was on leave from the University of Pittsburgh as a Smith-Mundt professor of political science at the Faculty of Law of the University of Saigon. In the spring of 1960, he undertook, with a Vietnamese colleague, an intensive investigation of the agrovillage program,

while participating in a project to study provincial administration organized by the Michigan State University Group in Vietnam. This investigation included an examination of documents as well as numerous interviews in Saigon with officials responsible for planning and execution of agrovillage operations. The author and his colleague visited three agrovillages (Vy Thuan, Caisan, Tan Luoc) in various stages of development, interviewing peasants and officials.

Tan Luoc, located in the Binh Minh District of Vinh Long Province, was chosen for study in depth. Four trips, for observation and interview, were made to Tan Luoc, and the complete agrovillage file at the district headquarters was studied. The district chief and his staff recounted at length the problems attendant upon building the Tan Luoc agrovillage. Village chiefs, notables, and peasants drafted from neighboring villages to work at the agrovillage were also interviewed. Other colleagues provided materials from the province file on agrovillages, and the province chief and his staff were interviewed.

This account of the agrovillage plan and the construction of the agrovillage at Tan Luoc is, then, a synthesis of this experience.

Rural Resettlement in Vietnam

On July 7, 1959, the 5th anniversary of President Ngo Dinh Diem's accession to power in the 7th day of the 7th month of 1954, celebrants throughout Vietnam heard Diem's voice, via their radios or the loud-speaker system:

On Double Seven Day this year I wish to lay down the main tasks which the government and people will endeavor to perform . . .

Notable among the "tasks" was a major new program designed to regroup the southern peasants into rural concentration centers:

. . . this year I propose to create *densely populated settlement areas* in the countryside, where conditions are favorable to communication and sanitation and where minimum facilities for the grouping of the farmers living in isolation and destitution in the back country exist. These settlement areas will not only improve the life of the rural population, but they will also constitute the economic units which will play an important role in the future development of the country as a whole.

The President went on to emphasize further that the newly created agrovilles would provide a framework for social and economic development of the rural areas. The grand scheme envisioned electricity, schools, maternity clinics, medical services, and social service facilities for each of the settlements. New crops were to be cultivated and training would be provided in modern methods of agriculture, artisan activity,

and manufacturing. The agrovillage, the President said, might well be the happy compromise between hustling, teeming city life and the placid rural existence. In the ensuing discussion of the program a French term was coined for the centers—*ville charniere*, "hinge city."

Not mentioned in the broadcast was a further reason for the agrovillage plan—the establishment of security. That this was a far more compelling motivation than social and economic development was demonstrated a week after the President's speech, when the Minister of Interior issued the following instructions to province chiefs, the prefects of Saigon and Cholon, and the mayors of all large cities:

Following the President's Double Seven Day speech one of the principal duties of 1959 will be the creation of agrovilles. The reason for this work is that the population, especially in the South, is living in such spread out manner that the government cannot protect them and they are obliged to furnish supplies to the Viet Cong. Therefore, it is necessary to concentrate this population, especially the families who have children still in the North or who are followers of the Viet Cong here. The echelons of government are requested to explain this policy to the people.

The minister's letter did not exaggerate the precariousness of the security situation. The Viet Cong, Communist-led guerrilla bands which are drawn in a good part from the southern peasantry, engaged in incessant insurgent activity and posed a vital threat to the government of South Vietnam.¹ There is no doubt that the agrovillage program was primarily a measure of counter-insurgency.

¹For sources of the Viet Cong, see the author's article in *Commentary*, February 1962.

The Security Problem

By 1959, when the President announced the agrovillage program, the Viet Cong had spread their terror widely, assassinating some ninety people monthly. Individual targets were largely selected from the people who cooperated with the Diem government—especially village chiefs and other such notables, civil servants, landowners and their agents and members of the security forces. In the badly disturbed areas a climate of fear had developed among all who participated in government activities. The officials in many villages felt it necessary to sleep in the communal hall under heavy guard, since their homes might be spread several kilometers from the village center, and even during the day, would seldom venture from headquarters into areas that were infested by the Viet Cong.

From the villagers, the guerrillas extracted taxes and tribute, food and supplies, and especially the information necessary for their activities. There was a barrage of propaganda through leaflets and by word of mouth, and at times, entire villages were mustered out for propaganda lectures or to view a public execution of officials.

In many rural areas of the South, the Viet Cong were in substantial control of the territory, especially at night. Some members of the bands led normal lives as villagers during the day and joined their comrades in rebel activities at night.¹ Others disappeared each day into the swamps, the brush, and the jungles, areas difficult for government security forces to penetrate and control.

The ceaseless struggle against the Viet Cong had deeply disturbing consequences for the developmental aims of the government. Administration had become tense and haphazard, with officials concentrating on the primary challenge, the security problem, often to the exclusion of other very important tasks. Economic development projects were either not undertaken or badly disrupted by attack—and fear of attack—from the Viet Cong. Landlords and their agents were afraid to collect rents in areas infiltrated by the guerrillas, and the resale of land under the agrarian reform program was hampered. A huge amount of the limited human and material resources was being devoted solely to dealing with the Communist danger.²

In this context, the agrovillage idea was conceived. The new centers would group the rural population beside major roads and arteries of communication along which the security forces could more easily move to provide protection and surveillance. With a concentrated living area, fences could be constructed, guard posts established, and the movement of the population could be controlled. Bringing people into such areas would, hopefully, remove them from vulnerability to Viet Cong tax collection, information-gathering, terrorism, and recruitment.

If the Viet Cong were to be fought, it was essential to identify and locate them. Although the number of active guerrillas in 1959—estimates ranged from 5,000 to 12,000—was a small proportion of the total fourteen million population of South Vietnam, their disruptive influence was overwhelming. The government, with its army of 150,000 and other security forces of approximately 100,000, could easily deal with them—if they could find them. But as long as either fear or sympathy kept the population from divulging information about the Viet Cong, the government's difficulty was enormous. Thus, the regroupment of the rural population was seen as a means, not only of building up fortified areas which could be controlled by military forces, but also of isolating the Viet Cong from their domination of important segments of the peasantry.

¹This situation was similar to the latter days of French colonial control of Vietnam. At that time, French forces maintained their control of the urban areas, and some rural areas during the day, while the anti-French guerrilla forces of the nationalists controlled the countryside at night.

²For an account of the economic problems raised by Viet Cong activity, see James B. Hendry, "Economic Development Under Conditions of Guerrilla Warfare: The Case of Vietnam," *Asian Survey*, June 1962, pp. 1-12.

Forerunners to the Agroville Program

REFUGEE CENTERS AND LAND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN THE HAUT PLATEAU

The Vietnamese had had previous experience in resettlement programs after independence. Following the Geneva Conference in 1954, some 850,000 refugees descended upon the South within a few months. The result was a period of relative anarchy, until resettlement centers were established and the northern peasants implanted there.

In late 1956, a land development program was undertaken in the region of the Haut Plateau, the mountainous, wooded section of central Vietnam. Here, agricultural relocation centers were developed, with peasants transported largely from crowded rural areas of the central coast. The Vietnamese government asked the U.S. aid mission for funds to support this program; when the mission refused the request, believing the program to be economically undesirable, President Diem committed indigenous resources and carried out the plan. There is no doubt that President Diem regards the program as having been a great achievement, although other observers consider its success debatable.¹

¹For case studies of these relocation schemes, see John D. Montgomery, *Cases in Vietnamese Administration*, published by Michigan State University Group, Saigon, 1959.

AGGLOMERATION CENTERS: QUI KHU AND QUI AP

In February 1959, a program of rural regroupment in badly harassed areas was undertaken. Agglomeration centers were established of two types and purposes. One type would group the so-called "Viet Cong families," in specific areas accessible to heavy surveillance by government authorities. The families included those suspected of being sympathetic to the Viet Cong, others thought to be especially vulnerable because of relatives in the North or relatives in the Viet Cong organization in the South, and even some who drew suspicion because of their long-ago affiliation with the Viet Cong when it led the nationalist movement in the fight for independence. Vague criteria, often only the opinion of the local officials, were used to define the "Viet Cong families." The centers that concentrated the families were known in Vietnamese as *qui khu*. The other type of center, known as *qui ap*, would concentrate families known to be reliable, patriotic, and loyal to the southern government, but, living in remote regions inaccessible to government control, they were especially vulnerable to the blandishments and threats of the Viet Cong. The aim was to bring them to concentrated areas where they would be protected and not in a position to give aid, comfort, or information to the Viet Cong.

According to Major Pham Ngoc Thao, a key official in developing and executing the later agrovillage program at the Directorate General of Reconstruction, the agglomeration center plan had its origin in the Ministry of Interior. Designed to improve security, it was bare, unsophisticated, and essentially military, ignoring the economic and social implications of relocation.

In the spring and summer of 1959, the ministries in Saigon exerted serious pressure on local officials to the program. Specific policy instructions were contained in a letter, dated July 9, 1959, from the Government Delegate for South Vietnam (an official responsible to the Minister of Interior and who has in his administrative area a number of province chiefs) to all province chiefs:

Subject: *Preparatory Instructions for the Concentration of Families*

Chiefs of district are ordered discreetly to take up relations with the presidents of village sections of the MRN, groups of friends, members of the councils of notables of the villages, hamlet chiefs, and with representatives of the population so that these groups *spontaneously* call for the opening of a conference under the presidency of the chief of district. At these conferences, the policy of the national government will be praised, the policy and actions of the Communists will be condemned, and at the conclusion there will be a demand for the concentration of all Viet Cong families in order to cut their relations with the Communists. These conferences will deliberate and indicate in general the principle by which these families will be concentrated: families having relatives in the North, or having relatives who work for the Viet Minh etc. These meetings must be held within a period of 10 to 15 days.

After the meetings a *proces verbale* will be submitted and attached to it will be a resolution stating the above decisions. Immediately afterward a list will be drawn up of the families. It is necessary to execute this concentration immediately.

According to Major Thao, vigorous protest accompanied attempts to develop the plan. Complaints were especially bitter from many highly placed families who were included as "Viet Cong families" because of their relatives in the North or relatives linked to the Viet Cong in the South.

In March, President Diem had appointed Major Thao to study the problems raised by the agglomeration center program. In the subsequent report to Diem, Thao pointed out the obvious inadequacies of the plan, and especially the extreme difficulty of defining the "Viet Cong families." Many people in the South had strong connections in the North, including the then Minister of Interior and Major Thao himself. Moreover, great numbers of people living in the South had a history of involvement with the resistance, including close collaboration with the Viet Cong during the period of French colonial domination.

The process of bringing Viet Cong families into one concentrated area and nationalist families into another meant, according to Major Thao, that "in the *qui khu*, we grouped our enemies and gave them more reason to be against us. In the *qui ap* we grouped our friends without regard for economic and social considerations. We gave them reason to be unhappy with their lot and to turn against us."

The report went on to suggest that, if there was to be concentration, Viet Cong and nationalist families should not be labeled and segregated. Economic and social conditions should be seriously considered in any regroupment. Loans should be provided to cover the hardships involved in moving. Hospitals, schools, maternity clinics, social services, and facilities for adult educational programs should be provided in order to establish a better life for the uprooted peasantry.

Major Thao made it clear that he found the plan for *qui khu* and *qui ap* to be ill-conceived and dangerous. His report, he believed, laid the groundwork for the later development of the agrovilles. Though the program of agglomeration centers was never formally eliminated, it was ultimately shunted aside.

The dossier compiled at Binh Minh district headquarters on the program gives an insight into its specific difficulties. Under orders to establish the agglomeration centers, the district leaders sent a delegation to visit the *qui khu* and *qui ap* that were already established at the nearby province of Vy Thuan. The delegation, composed of chiefs of villages, chiefs of police, an agent of the information service, and an agent of the

Civic Action Commissariat of the district, submitted a detailed report to the province chief on September 30.²

The report noted that the *qui khu* and *qui ap* had been established in the region because it was seriously overrun by Viet Cong. Among the problems the delegation encountered in the regroupment were these:

The regrouped families in the *qui ap* say they have committed no crime and yet they are obliged to be transferred, causing them wrong for their work and their pocketbooks . . . The propaganda was insufficient. The program of the *qui khu* and the *qui ap* was a severe one and from the point of view of implementation there was not enough propaganda to explain it. Even the hamlet chiefs committed the error of telling the population in the *qui ap* that they will never be able to return to their former homes. For this reason these families are discouraged and long for the things they left behind.

The delegation proposed a program for implementation of agglomeration centers in their own district. Drawing upon the experience of their visit, they recommended that loyal, dispersed families whom the government could not protect be regrouped into *qui ap*, and that "all pro-Communist families who have relatives in the North or who worked for the Viet Minh be regrouped in the *qui khu* without distinction as to whether they live in insecure zones or not." The latter families were not to be mixed with the loyal families, and government control over them was to be more severe. The report recommended that government policy be explained in a propaganda campaign that would "work on the population so that they request to live in the *qui khu* and the *qui ap*."

The Binh Minh plan was prepared in great detail, but before it could be implemented, it was replaced by the agrovillage concept. In the meantime, a few "Communist families" were forced to move into special areas of villages of the district where they were placed under close surveillance. The *qui khu* and the *qui ap* which the delegation had visited at Vy Thuan were converted into the first agrovillage, which then served as a showcase of the agrovillage plan for visitors from other provinces and for the national and international press.

²A full text of this report will be found in Appendix I of this article.

The Agroville Plan

Plans were being laid for the agroville program, even while the program of agglomeration centers was still being implemented. Though the new concept was not made public until the Double Seven Day speech of the President, administrative groundwork had been prepared several months previously and preparatory instructions issued as early as April.

No information was ever published regarding the total scope of the agroville scheme, but comment from officials involved in the planning indicates that a significant segment of the peasantry in the southern delta region, upwards of a half million people, was expected to be grouped into agrovilles between 1960 and 1963. Eighty central agrovilles, *khu tru mats*, were envisaged, with whatever number of satellites, *ab tru mats*, would be necessary.¹

The plan itself, according to Major Thao, was part of an even larger basic security plan for the country. The total plan had four elements:

1. *Regroupment of the population into agrovilles, linked by a new strategic route system.* Two major routes from Ca Mau to Saigon

¹The Vietnamese term which has been Anglicized as "agroville" is *thi tran gia mien dong que*, most closely translated "rural city." President Diem has used the term *khu thu mat*, or "prosperous dense center."

were contemplated, one passing by Vy Thuan and the other by Rach Gia. Agrovilles would be constructed on these routes, providing a solid defense system along a good set of highways.

2. *Development of competent cadres for village councils and administrative posts.* A continuing problem was the difficulty of developing competent and honest leaders for these positions. In many locations, the corruptibility and inefficiency of incumbent officials made it virtually impossible to assure the sympathy of the local population. Competent replacements for them were scarce, both because new leaders had not been developed in sufficient numbers and because village finances were short, so that the best candidates were not attracted by meager salaries. It was hoped that the agrovilles would provide more opportunity for leaders to emerge and that economic development would permit higher salaries.

3. *Improvement of village self-finance resources, especially the development of public lands.* In each agrovillage, public lands were set aside to be planted with fruit trees and ponds were designed for fish raising, providing new sources of village revenue. Major Thao estimated that effective use of public lands would, within six years, produce approximately 200,000 piastres yearly.

The nation's potential major revenue source is from the tax on rice lands—but only 20 to 25 percent of the owners pay their taxes. Major Thao attributed the government's tax-collecting difficulty partly to the Viet Cong's exaction of tribute from the villages. Increased security was therefore seen as a direct avenue to more dependable revenue.

Other sources of increased tax revenue through the agrovillage program were envisioned. Increased market activity, for instance, would yield greater income. Improved transportation would encourage the use of automobiles and other taxable vehicles. The increased private production of fruit trees would yield more cash value than rice fields.

4. *The formation of a vigorous youth movement.* The government hoped to select ardent, energetic, intelligent young men who could be trained to provide leadership for rural communities. The youths, it was felt, if so trained, could be more effective than the present village guards and would eventually replace them.

* * * * *

It is clear that the agrovillage idea was central to this whole complex and optimistic plan. In dismal contrast to the grandeur of the initial program is the fact that, within nearly 2 years after its inception,

some 23 agrovilles had been inaugurated with a total of perhaps 40,000 inhabitants. Sometime in 1961 the plan appears to have been abandoned. Although no formal announcement of termination was made, new construction was no longer initiated and the public "selling" of the program ceased. Most of these agrovilles are still functioning, but there is little current information to evaluate their status or success.

During the two years of its implementation, the agrovillage scheme made a radical impact upon the lives of the peasantry in the southern delta region. Tens of thousands were mobilized to construct the new settlements and thousands feared they would be forced to abandon their homes for a new life on the agrovillage. The government added still another relocation project—more grandiose in conception than the previous ones—to its brief experience in independence. The agrovillage experience, if examined in depth, should offer lessons to the government in its implementation of the program which followed the agrovilles, the development of strategic hamlets.

The Agrovillage at Tan Luoc: A Case Study

The account that follows describes the establishment of the agrovillage in the Village of Tan Luoc in Vinh Long Province; supplementary observations were gathered at Caisan, an agrovillage 30 miles from Tan Luoc and in the same province. Since the Tan Luoc project and the other agrovillages completed were essentially based on the same prototype, our description may be taken as generally typifying the agrovillage work plan in the entire southern region. A pattern for agrovillage construction had been worked out in Saigon, based on good measure upon the experience drawn from the first agrovillage developed at Vy Thuan in the fall of 1959, and remarkably few variations on the basic scheme were made thereafter.

THE AGROVILLE SITE

In May 1959, Khuu Van Ba, province chief of Vinh Long, ordered his six district chiefs to select localities for the establishment of agrovillages. The chief of Binh Minh District selected the area adjacent to Tan Luoc Village, the side which had been envisaged for one of the agglomeration centers (*quê khu* and *quê ap*).

Important strategic reasons went into the selection of Tan Luoc as the agrovillage site. It is located in a region bounded by two principal Communist-action centers--the Plaine des Joncques (Plain of Reeds), on the north, and U Minh to the south. The area of Plaine des Joncques, near the Cambodian frontier, has historically been difficult to control, and during the colonial period, its inhabitants offered fierce resistance to the French. The U Minh region is topographically well suited to guerrilla activity; its dense forest, rich in fruit, berries, and fishing streams, made it easy for the Viet Cong to hide and sustain themselves. The region also affords access to the sea and contact with Thailand and Cambodia on a long seacoast impossible to control.

Thus an agrovillage at Tan Luoc was seen as providing a fortified zone to break up Communist communication. The major road connections adjacent to Tan Luoc could be effectively patrolled by national security forces using trucks and modern vehicles. Military access to the new center would be further improved as the road construction program provided new links between this rural area and the provincial towns and Saigon.

Another important reason for the selection of Tan Luoc was the presence in the region of a predominant majority of the Hao Hoa sect, a Buddhist-influenced offshoot of the traditional Vietnamese ancestor-worship cult. The Hao Hoa had developed as a separate religious hierarchy; under French rule, it maintained its own army. In the years following World War II, the French strengthened and encouraged the sect, hoping it would be an effective counterweight to the growing strength of the Communists, although the Hao Hoa continually vacillated between supporting and opposing the French during the period of colonial domination. Their relations with the Viet Cong were equally checkered; during the brief period the Communists were in control of the Tan Luoc region at the end of the war, the Hao Hoa developed a bitter antipathy toward the guerrilla bands.

Following partition in 1954 and independence for South Vietnam, the sect became antagonistic to the Diem government. Its leadership, jealous of local control, resisted the efforts of President Diem to consolidate his power in Saigon, but Diem was successful in disbanding the Hao Hoa army and breaking up its leadership, imprisoning or executing some, forcing others into exile, and neutralizing the remainder.

This struggle in the early months of independence embittered the Hao Hoa, and the residue of antipathy toward the Diem government had not dissipated. Therefore, in centers of Hao Hoa population, Viet Cong activity has been especially virulent. Support for or toleration of

Viet Cong activity has provided one of the few means of protest available to the peasantry who are members of the sect.¹

THE PHYSICAL SETTING

The Tan Luoc agroville is situated on the shores of the Rach Tra Mon River, which is fed by streams crossing the settlement's land area. This river now provides the water supply for the newly dug canals.

Across this land area, 6 canals in the north-south direction and 6 in the east-west direction have been dug. This checker-board arrangement left a block of land between each bisecting canal of approximately 1 square kilometer, which was then subdivided into 12 family plots, each 20 by 40 meters (a half hectare). The center for each 12-plot grouping was a communal pond in which fish might be raised. Upon each of the half-hectare plots, an extra layer of dirt was deposited to provide the foundation for a thatch hut to be constructed by the peasant family. The foundation was elevated to protect the hut against the rising waters of the canal during the rainy season.

It was planned that the members of each family would raise fruit trees, poultry, and small farm animals on their plot. They would also continue to cultivate their rice lands located outside the agroville; this meant tending to the rice field during the day and returning to the agroville at night. For any given peasant, the distance to the rice fields from the agroville would be between 1 and 5 kilometers.

As provided in the general pattern for agrovilles, Tan Luoc contained a number of public buildings, all of them constructed by the common labor force. These included the school, the church, a maternity hospital and dispensary, and a central market building. For common use, also, an artificial lake and a small pond were dug.

THE BUDGET

For the construction at Tan Luoc, the national government allocated one million piastres, which was the standard sum for each agroville.² For the 6-room school, 300,000 piastres were appropriated; for the maternity clinic and infirmary, 250,000 piastres; the market, 150,000 piastres; electric light installation for the center square of the village, 300,000 piastres.

¹See author's article, "Peasant Protest in South Vietnam," in *Revolution in World Politics*, edited by Morton Kaplan, to be published by John Wiley, Inc., 1982.

²The officially established rate of exchange for computation of U.S. dollar aid was 35 piastres to 1 dollar. Another (more realistic) official rate, used for converting dollars to piastres, was 70 piastres to 1 dollar.

Funds additional to the basic allocation were promised by the government for construction of roads to connect Tan Luoc with the major highway; the estimated cost was some four million piastres. To develop the market area of the agrovillage further, the government offered up to 50 loans of 70,000 piastres each to merchants who wished to construct selling stalls at the market site. The loans were repayable at 6 percent interest per year over a 4-year period.

ORGANIZING THE CONTRUCTION PLAN

The major work tasks for preparation of the agrovillage, though heavy and laborious, were uncomplicated. Organized teams of men were to dig the canals, the most important job; as they shoveled up the dirt from the ditches, other teams would pound it along the side of the canal to form a road. Team excavations were also required for the artificial lake and for the public buildings. Each peasant family scheduled to live at the agrovillage was expected to construct their own living quarters, the traditional Vietnamese thatched hut.

A target date for completion of preparation and construction had been set at higher headquarters in Saigon. It was the responsibility of the province, district, and local officials to recruit men, assign tasks, allot quotas, and supervise work—all to the end of meeting the deadline.

The province chief, Mr. Ba, was under strong pressure from the Diem administration to complete the agrovillage rapidly. He relayed the demand for speed to the Binh Minh district chief, Captain Nguyen Dhuoc Huynh, in whose jurisdiction Tan Luoc was located. At the agrovillage site, an army lieutenant responsible in technical matters to the Directorate General of Reconstruction but in administrative matters to the district chief, directed the work. The Tan Luoc village chief was responsible for drafting village inhabitants to participate in the work scheme.

On November 28, 1959, the district chief called a meeting of his assistant, the commander of the district civil guard, the information officer, and an agent of the Civic Action group. A plan was laid out for administrative supervision at each echelon: a district committee was to be directed by the chief; nine village committees were to be directed by the village chiefs; and an agrovillage committee was to be directed by the lieutenant at the agrovillage. Tan Luoc village was ordered to supply the first contingent of 500 workers for the agrovillage.^a

A week later, to develop a specific work plan, the district chief called a meeting of the lieutenant, the chief of the district youth organiza-

^aFor the official summary of this meeting, see Appendix II.

tion, Civic Action and information representatives, and the police chiefs of the nine villages of the district.⁴ Requirements for manpower were established, ranging from a quota of 300 to be drawn from the smallest village to 800 from the largest. Teams of 10 were called for, with each team expected to dig 3 meters of canal. Instructions from Saigon directed that the "community development principle" (*Cong Dong Phat Trien*) was to be employed for agrovillage labor—in other words, no remuneration could be paid.

The labor draft in My Thuan, largest of the district's nine villages, was typical of the pattern used elsewhere. When My Thuan received its first order to supply 1,500 men, the village chief, in collaboration with other village officials, established two categories: young man from 18 to 25 to be recruited for work; and men from 36 to 50 to replace the young men on the night hamlet patrols that were necessary for protection against the Viet Cong. The first work draft enlisted the 1,500 My Thuan men for only 3 days, probably, according to one official, because they were all eager to return home to bring in the rice harvest. The later second draft took 800 men for a work period of 10 days; thus the peasants were committing a larger period of time but would need to do so less frequently.

Certain inhabitants of My Thuan obtained exemption from labor duty. Those able to afford it could purchase a replacement for their labor by paying an assessment known as *uy lao*, and the wealthier landowners and merchants did so. Several local rice mill owners purchased relief for their workers also. Some of the less affluent villagers fulfilled their work requirement by providing boat service, carrying workers down the twenty miles of river and canal system which led from My Thuan to the agrovillage site. Still others were exempted from agrovillage duty when special circumstances arose. For example, a Catholic priest requested temporary relief from work for seventeen villagers who were to help him reconstruct a church which had been destroyed by the Viet Cong. The relief was granted by the village chief, but not before he received written authority from the district chief to do so.

To mobilize the necessary work quotas, the village chief divided the assignments among the three hamlets of the village. The hamlet chiefs then met with the chiefs of five-family groups (*lien gia*), a unit of control within the hamlet, to determine the number of laborers available. Each group leader listed those who could work at the agrovillage and those who should be excused. The general practice was to avoid taking all the males from any one family at one time.

⁴The official summary of this meeting is in Appendix III.

At the agroville site, the workers were organized into 10-man hamlet teams, each of which was given a quota of earth to move that would normally require 10 days' time. If a team could complete its quota earlier, it was excused. This system encouraged workers to bring their wives and children along as helpers so that their stint might be finished more quickly. The men were required to bring their own food, provided their own transportation, and carry their own shovels to work. Some of the men often dug at night, thus avoiding the day's intense heat. Many did not wish to work at night, however, for fear of being shot by the Viet Cong or of getting caught in the cross fire between security guards and marauding Viet Cong.

The day-to-day work progress was recorded on a chart at agroville headquarters; it showed that more than 1,300 people per day were at work in early April. On April 3, for example, they dug up 1,417 cubic meters of earth for a distance of 420 meters of the canal and pounded down 210 cubic meters of earth for the roadway.⁵

PEASANT ATTITUDES REGARDING THE WORK

In our interviewing, it was extremely difficult to get a frank expression of peasant attitude regarding work at the agroville. However, several peasants did report their discontent with the requirement that they furnish their own food and transportation, indicating that this drained their resources, especially since the work did not supplement their income. A few expressed open resentment of the work obligation as a whole, and some complained that, with the men away at the agroville, no one was left at home for gardening or chores.

The local officials generally claimed that the peasants accepted their duties with a minimum of complaining. A hamlet chief explained that if a peasant is not a "good citizen," he can get into much trouble. Refusal to work on the agroville might be regarded as an antigovernment attitude and the refuser might then be subjected to harassment; for example, if he applied for an exit visa from the village, he might be refused. Therefore, contended the hamlet chief, his people were eager to work on the agroville in order to earn their work certificates and be permitted to return home to their own fields.

THE QUESTION OF COMPENSATION

The decision that workers would not be paid for their labor at the agrovilles was made by President Diem, leaving no room for administrative

⁵This report is found in Appendix IV.

discretion at lower echelons. Diem believed, according to sources who discussed the issue with him, that the government was fully justified in requiring this kind of work from the inhabitants without pay, especially since peasants pay few taxes and receive the benefits of government which include agricultural credit, land distribution, and police protection. The work stints at the agroville would come, he maintained, when the peasants were normally idle, their rice having been planted and not yet ready to harvest. The project itself would be of great benefit to them. In short, the President seemed convinced that the peasants were enthusiastic about the agroville program, and that the benefits would be conspicuous. Whatever discomfort might be incurred along the way would, he felt, fade into insignificance when the final result was produced.

Corvée labor is certainly not new to Vietnam. The French colonial authorities used it consistently, drafting their labor from the population for such projects as road building and military installations, and labor drafts had been used for centuries under the Vietnamese emperors and their Chinese conquerors. Government supporters of this newest "labor draft" pointed out that it would be absurd for an underdeveloped country, whose financial resources were severely strained, to burden its budget with payments to citizens performing a task during a period of idleness, especially since the work would contribute to the development of their country.

Proponents of paying the peasantry raised other issues. The agrovilles were being constructed in areas of great insecurity, subject to the menace and depredation of the Viet Cong. The success of the Communist activities greatly depended upon the support of the local population; therefore, it was extremely important, the pay proponents argued, for the government to build goodwill for itself in these areas. Forced labor drafts for a project which obviously would make radical changes in the life pattern of the peasantry, traditionally resistant to change, would provide the Viet Cong with a made-to-order issue for exploitation. At a minimum, this argument held, food and transportation should have been provided for the peasants.

A few interested officials proposed that a daily wage be paid—perhaps twenty piastres, near to the current daily wage for such labor—on the theory that this would reduce the discontent which arises when men are drawn from their leisure, their homes and gardens, their families. In fact, the peasant discontent might turn to pleasure at the opportunity to earn extra income.

Proponents of paying the peasants held that the government could well afford this expense. It was suggested that the government could

print or borrow piastres, though this would have been inflationary. Another alternative was the use of foreign exchange reserves already available, generating piastres by the sale of foreign exchange to local importers. In any case, the piastres paid to the peasant workers would create immediate purchasing power, the effect of which would be spread rapidly, since normally low-income peasants would probably spend such extra income readily. The inflationary pressure would be offset, the argument continued, by an increased supply of goods, provided by importers who purchased dollar credits.

In short, if this plan had been followed, it would have meant that the agrovillage construction was financed with external assets which had already been acquired. Adding weight to the argument was the fact that Vietnam had a supply of foreign exchange reserves which was estimated at U.S. \$200 million.⁶

OTHER PROBLEMS: LAND COMPENSATION AND TRADITION

The construction at Tan Luoc, like that of the other agrovillages, required the expropriation of private land. The land value fixed by a commission composed of 3 representatives of the government, 2 representatives of the peasants, and 1 of the landowners was from 2,500 to 10,000 piastres per hectare, depending upon its location, fertility, and whether it was fallow or cultivated. At Tan Luoc, the land expropriated was paid for in cash by the government at an official ceremony in Saigon at which the President presided. Peasants moving on to the land were required to purchase it, for the same price at which it had been expropriated, and were allowed four years to pay. This obligation to pay for the agrovillage plot was a further source of peasant resentment.

Reimbursement was provided to landowners for damages caused to their land during the construction. Special commissions consisting of the chief of the district, an agent of the agrarian reform office, a representative of the village council, and a representative of the landowners assessed the losses. Damage done to rice land before the harvest period was indemnified with a rice payment, taken from the communal rice store of the village, the *can dien*. In some cases of large losses, the government in Saigon was asked to contribute. The provincial letter file, for example, showed a request from the province chief to the Minister of Reconstruction for 100,000 piastres to pay owners whose crops were damaged before the harvest.

⁶For a discussion of the economic implications of using these dollar reserves for wage payments to construct the agrovillages, see an interview with Dr. Frank Child, Michigan State University economist, in Appendix V.

Harvesttime brought special problems to the agrovillage work program. The peasants' discontent mounted in proportion to the time they were required to work when they should be harvesting their own rice crops. Moreover, harvest also meant the coming of *Tet*, the Vietnamese New Year, a holiday of great joy, revelry, and family reunion. *Tet* is an expensive holiday for the peasant, and at this time above all others, he wishes to earn extra cash.

As harvesttime drew near, some peasants were boldly abandoning their tasks at Tan Luoc and other locations. The government apparently recognized that something must be done. Permission was finally granted by the Director General of Reconstruction for a work interruption until the harvest season and *Tet* had passed.

Another serious problem was involved in the removal of family tombs located in the rice fields that were dug up to make way for the agrovillage. In the Vietnamese ancestor cult, it is immensely important for the family to pay homage to its ancestors at the family tomb, traditionally located in the rice field, and a family moving to a new location would always transfer its tomb. When land was taken for the agrovillage site, the families concerned were required to transfer their tombs—at their own cost. Some families were slow in moving the tombs, and the district chief finally ordered that, unless transferred within a month, they would be officially removed.

The district chief's correspondence file bears a record of one case where a woman was allotted 1,000 piastres from the social service fund to move her family tomb.

MAINTENANCE OF SECURITY AT CONSTRUCTION SITES

Security against Viet Cong attack on the agrovillage sites was a major problem. A virulent propaganda campaign against the program was maintained by the Viet Cong, and officials responsible for implementing the program were constantly threatened. Precautions taken against Viet Cong attack included the assignment of village defense forces to constant guard duty at the site and the posting of sentries on roads used by the peasants to reach the agrovillage.

The district chief, Nguyen Huu Tri, of Caisan, the agrovillage under construction about thirty miles from Tan Luoc, told us that the Viet Cong had issued orders to the peasants not to appear at Caisan for work, and then backed up their orders with several attacks. The agrovillage maintained a constant guard of 100 men. The chief also reported that

he received a threatening letter from the Viet Cong every day. To reach his home, about 10 kilometers from the agrovillage, he felt required to change his route daily, often taking the 50-kilometer road in order to confuse attackers.

The province chief, Mr. Ba, in an interview in April, concurred with the district chief on the tremendous danger involved in traveling to the agrovillage. He had sent his family to Saigon a few weeks previously. Speeding up the work at Saigon's demand would be his death warrant, he predicted, since regular inspection trips to the two sites would make him an easy target for the Viet Cong.

One week following this interview, Mr. Ba made an inspection visit to Caisan. He had come to the agrovillage in a convoy accompanied by armed bodyguards and a heavily-armed jeep. On the return trip, the convoy ran into a roadblock laid by a Viet Cong ambush; the convoy's guards were isolated, and Mr. Ba was shot. After receiving a lecture from the attackers, the others were set free. It was clear that the Viet Cong had chosen to assassinate the head man of the province because he had the primary responsibility for implementing the agrovillage program.

MOVING THE PEASANTS INTO THE AGROVILLE

When the agrovillage program was first announced, public statements frequently reiterated that the agrovillages were designed to regroup families living in far-out regions, and that the program would not necessarily affect those living in the more accessible and concentrated locations. A second category of families to be moved into the agrovillage, it was generally believed, were those suspected of Viet Cong activity or those having relatives in the Communist movement. These families could be put under closer surveillance, just as they had been at the agglomeration centers.

If the government's original intention had actually been to resettle these two categories exclusively, as the newspapers seemed to indicate, it is clear that in the actual administration of the program changes were made in plans and new categories for resettlement developed. The following account shows the evolution of these categories with the exclusion of resettlement.

In a letter dated March 12, 1960, the chief of Vinh Long Province received notice from the Director General of Reconstruction that a meeting of agrovillage officers in Saigon had established the following priorities for settlement:

1. Landowners and their children having property in the agrovillage area;
2. Families expelled from the agrovillage zone;
3. Victims of the Communists;
4. Poor families who had participated actively in the agrovillage construction;
5. Families of the military and the civic guards;
6. Other families selected by the committee charged with the study of this problem.

The province chief transmitted this letter to his district chief with instructions that lists of future agrovillage inhabitants be established with these priorities. The chief of Binh Minh District, in turn, wrote to the lieutenant in charge of agrovillage construction, instructing him to prepare the list of inhabitants. In his communication, the chief cited the following priorities for Tan Luoc:

1. People owning land or living in the agrovillage;
2. Victims of the Communists;
3. People of the region with patriotic and anti-Communist reputations;
4. People from other villages who are patriotic nationalists and anti-Communist.

The lieutenant then sent a letter to each of the nine villages of the district asking the village chief to send a list of people who requested permission to live at the agrovillage. If there were no requests, this should be reported by April 12, 1960.

Lists containing "requests" came only from two villages, Tan Luoc and Tan Loi, both with area adjacent to the agrovillage. To obtain these lists, the chiefs of the two villages gave "explanations" only to villagers designated to move into the agrovillage. These peasants were given "request" forms to sign indicating that they had "volunteered" to move into the agrovillage. This form indicated that a parcel of land had been allotted to them at the agrovillage. By June 9, 127 families had signed "request" forms.

The pattern of resettlement at the Caisan agrovillage also indicated that the initial categories for resettlement established in Saigon had little practical meaning. The entire population within a radius of six kilometers of the agrovillage was, in fact, forced to settle on it. Prior to the

move, the district chief had called the five-family hamlet chiefs to the agrovillage for an explanation session. After making certain that all were present, by control of their identity cards, he explained that each family would receive a 40 by 80 meter plot of land on which a dirt foundation had been laid, and each family would be allocated 300 to 500 piastres, depending on the size of its hut, to help defray the cost of the move.

On a day selected as propitious for the move, according to Vietnamese custom, the peasants dismantled their huts and carted them to the new home site. The district chief organized some help for them with trucks and motorized sampans.

The move was the source of great discontent among the Caisan peasants. They had been forced out of their traditional homesteads that were surrounded by gardens and trees and rice fields; they were leaving the ancestral tombs at which they paid homage to their ancestors. They came to a new home site that was barren, without trees to provide shade against the tropical sun. The new area was a vast, bare, checker-board of crisscrossing canals with square plots of land on which there was only uninviting, untended grass and a mud foundation.

The peasant was now obliged to walk from the agrovillage (and only when his work there was done) to his own rice fields and gardens. He could not give them the constant attention they required to be protected from intemperate weather, torrential rains, the ravages of rodents, and theft. Many families complained of the damages they incurred in the move.

The foundations of their former thatched houses were solid; the foundations at the agrovillage had been made in haste and were sinking. They protested that 300 piastres did not cover the cost of moving; it bought at best only the leaves necessary for a new roof. When they had dismantled their old huts, many of which had been standing for long years, they found that the wooden supports would often break and the thatched leaves crumble. Though providing adequate protection when untouched, many of the huts did not stand the strain of transfer.

The farm animals—pigs, ducks, chickens—could not be moved because there was no place to house them at the new plot. The water buffalo, the sturdy draught animal of the monsoon tropics, were not permitted to enter the agrovillage area because the heavy weight of their hoofs sank into the new, unsettled mud road.

The peasants complained of the inadequate toilet facilities. In their former homes, largely located along large canals or streams, excrement

was carried off by the flowing water, and privacy was furnished by the abundant trees and other vegetation, but the new land sites were bare of all this. The district chief promised to teach the population to construct sanitary water closets, but this did not assuage the dissatisfaction. Several families proposed digging ditches which could be filled with water and then seeded with cayo fish, a species that eats human excrement. Though this piscicultural scheme appeared utilitarian, the district chiefs forbade it for reasons of health.

Several incidents connected with Caisan illustrate the kind of problems that could arise in the agrovillage development. At one time, when all the men of a certain village had been drafted for agrovillage work at Caisan, several children who were without proper care drowned in canals. The Viet Cong used this in their propaganda denouncements of the agrovillage program. A number of women in another village were raped by men in uniform of the national army while all the village males were working at the agrovillage. According to the district chief, it was not clear whether the attackers were really government soldiers or disguised Viet Cong.

When a bold, old woman was offered 400 piastres by the village chief to defray the cost of her movement to the agrovillage, she countered with an offer to him of 400 piastres if he would permit her to remain. A stubborn peasant man resisted another village chief's order to move. After surete agents spirited his wife off at midnight, the frightened husband, pleading for the release of his wife, agreed to move immediately.

PROPAGANDA AND COUNTERPROPAGANDA

Government officials at all levels frequently iterated the necessity of explaining fully to the peasants how important the agrovillage program was. However, there was a great gap between these fervent official exhortations—plus the glowing accounts in the city press of the agrovillage information program—and the actual achievement at the peasant level. Even with the best of techniques, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make palatable a basically unpopular program. The Vietnamese peasant, with no tradition of trust in a central government, was understandably skeptical about the promises for schools, maternity clinics, electricity and social services. Government propagandists had to face not only this skepticism but also the vigorous counterpropaganda of the Viet Cong.

The government did not neglect to undertake propaganda on behalf of the agrovillage at Tan Luoc. Two agents of the Civic Action Commissariat moved among the peasants as they worked on the construction, attempting to persuade them of the desirability of their task. The district information officer, who was also head of the district's official political party, the National Revolutionary Movement (NRM), made frequent trips to the site. He installed loud-speakers to broadcast official speeches and, from time to time, showed films supplied by the national government. He also pressed village information officers to explain the value of the agrovillage to their villagers.

At the province headquarters in the town of Vinh Long, several lectures on agrovillage aims were given to provincial civil servants and community audiences. The province chief created "committees of encouragement," composed of provincial officials, to distribute supplementary rations and prizes for work well achieved at the agrovillage. Mr. Ba ordered some members of his staff, to their great trepidation, to volunteer for agrovillage labor in order to demonstrate that city officials were participating. The periodic political rallies, required at all levels of government, incessantly praised the agrovillage philosophy and denounced Viet Cong opposition.

It is difficult to determine the degree of pervasiveness of the Viet Cong counterpropaganda, since it is largely passed by word of mouth, and punishment for its repetition is severe. There is no doubt, however, that the Viet Cong were relentless in their activity against the agrovillages. They burned and sacked agrovillage sites when possible. They ordered those under their persuasion not to cooperate with the government in implementation of the program. They cannily selected for special punishment those officials who were active in agrovillage work and also unpopular among the villagers. A hamlet youth leader in Binh Minh District, whose duty it was to recruit workers for the agrovillage at Tan Luoc, was ordered by the Viet Cong, upon pain of death, to cease his activities. The threatening letter said in part:⁷

While facing failure the Americans and Diem have more dangerous plots. They are building agrovillages everywhere. Agrovillages are big prisons and hells on earth. When these agrovillages are completed, they will concentrate the peace-loving, patriotic families there in order to exploit their wealth to draft young men so that they have enough forces to start the invasion of the North, causing bloody killing among brothers...

You are very efficient in recruiting workers for agrovillages. In this undertaking, you and the hamlet chief accept bribes from the people. If someone wishes to remain home, he pays you privately, such as in the fourth collection of pay in lieu of work

⁷The complete text of this letter, and the text of another Viet Cong letter to the secretary of the same hamlet are found in Appendix VI.

on March 27, 1960. You have forced many (93) people to work at Tan Luoc agrovillage. Some of them who have not yet finished with their farming work came to you to ask for a cancellation and you threatened to bring them to the village council to settle the matter and you accepted bribes from those who stayed home. There were people who had to pay you four times in lieu of work. Besides bribes in cash, you and the hamlet secretary accepted bribes in kind such as mangoes, vegetables, tea, etc. . . .

On behalf of the revolution and the people, we, the commanding staff of Company 256 of the Battalion Ly Thuong Kiet, once again order you to stop your servant job.

If you violate this order, the revolution and the people will not guarantee your life nor your property.

March 29, 1960

BCH Company 256

Two principal theories have been put forward to account for the special vigor of the Viet Cong's antiagrovillage activity. According to the first theory, the Viet Cong realized that the agrovillages, when fully operative, would succeed in eliminating peasant vulnerability to demands of the underground; therefore, the program must, by all means, be defeated. This was the official government position.

The other holds that the Communists had found in the program an excellent way of exploiting peasant bitterness against the government. Recognizing popular hatred for the agrovillages, the Viet Cong could gain support by demonstrating that they would fight against this resettlement. The assassination of local functionaries implementing this program, especially if they were unpopular or really corrupt, made the Viet Cong seem to be the peasant's defenders.

Other opposition to the agrovillage program was expressed by the "Caravelle Group," 18 non-Communist intellectuals among whom were 10 former cabinet ministers, in an open letter to President Diem dated April 26, 1960. This letter, released during the flurry of political activity in Vietnam following the overthrow of Syngman Rhee in Korea, listed a long series of complaints against the government. On the agrovillages, the letter stated:

Tens of thousands of people are being mobilized for hardship and toil to leave their work and go far from their homes and fields, separated from their parents, wives and children, to take up a life in collectivity in order to construct beautiful but useless agrovillages which tire the people, lose their affection, increase their resentment and most of all give an additional opportunity for propaganda to the enemy.

Conclusions and Evaluations

In early 1961, as the security situation grew worse, construction of the last agrovillage was undertaken. For a time in the fall of 1961, following the report of a summer study commission headed by Professor Eugene Staley, it appeared that the agrovillage program might be modified and revised with U.S. aid. However, with Viet Cong subversion increasing in intensity, by late 1961 the agrovillage concept gave way to the strategic hamlet program as the core of the counterinsurgency campaign. The reasons for abandonment of the agrovillage plan were never officially stated. An evaluation of the agrovillage program may provide an insight into the actual reasons for the abandonment and perhaps offer guidance concerning problems of the current organization of strategic hamlets.

The agrovillage program was primarily aimed at alleviating insecurity by regrouping the population in areas that could be adequately controlled and thus cutting off the sources of Viet Cong support in the countryside. The program was also designed to provide economic and social development through a new form of rural organization.

It was clear at the outset that the peasant disliked the program. He was disturbed by the prospect of uprooting his home, sheltered by trees which offered shade and fruit, quitting his ancestral tombs, separating himself from his rice field and garden. He was compelled to abandon a traditional pattern of life for a fresh start in an uninviting site; he was obliged to build a new home, plant young trees, and till a fallow plot

which he had not chosen, but was required to buy. This factor of forced indebtedness added a burden to the strain of displacement.

The new living arrangement brought him closer to his neighbor and subjected him to tighter government surveillance. Such a plan might have been less disruptive in Central Vietnam, President Diem's region of origin, or in the North, where concentration in villages is the pattern of rural living. But the southern peasantry have preferred more dispersed dwelling arrangements; a hut located on a river or stream is usually separated widely from that of the next neighbor. Thus, those who believed that only the scattered families most inaccessible to communication would be drawn into the "dense and prosperous centers" where rudely shocked when they learned that the essential scheme was to regroup the entire population of an area. When improvements promised at the new agrovilles did not appear, shock deepened to resentment.

Yet, the conspicuous unpopularity of the program is not proof that the agrovillage conception was bad. One could argue that given the situation, it would ultimately be an advantage to the people involved, even if they were forced to do what they did not wish to do. There is little doubt that the fortress-like quality of the agrovilles, as well as the improved roads and the more closely grouped of the population, could provide greater physical security. But this tactical strength must be balanced against the demoralizing effect of a community disturbed by labor demands, moving, constructing new homes, and plotting a new work pattern. The disruption and resentment caused by the agrovillage program offered fertile ground for Viet Cong recruitment and support.

Even if the program did promote physical security, its much-touted provision for economic and social development remains uncertain. The promised social services—schools, maternity clinics, dispensaries—could have been as easily provided, in most cases, to the people in their traditional living arrangement. Tan Luoc, for example, was a village where the dwellings were relatively closely grouped, so that most children would have only a short walk to a new school. At Caisan, people were brought into the agrovillage from a radius of six kilometers, a distance not at all unreasonable for a clinic to serve. The regrouped peasant was then obliged to walk a good distance to his rice fields, and he could not maintain his former vigil against rodents, thieves, and intemperate weather; yet, the radical alteration of the living pattern did not seem to offer significant economic advantage. The fundamental agricultural system remained unchanged. Possibly fruit orchards, fish cultivation, and home artisan activity would have been strengthened with training programs that might be initiated with agrovillage living. On balance, however, it

appears that the economic and social contribution of the agrovilles was grossly overestimated. The heavy human costs incurred in their construction seem hardly to be compensated by the promise of better living standards.

Implementation of the agrovillage plan, though a great improvement over that of its predecessor, the agglomeration plan, still had many faults. The pilot agrovillage at Vy Thuan had been constructed with brutal rapidity, yet the work pattern developed there served generally to guide other construction. Saigon cast an agrovillage mold in the shape of the Vy Thuan construction, and this was impressed throughout the southern region, with almost no adaptation to local conditions.

The use of corvee labor to build agrovilles was a source of bitterness. True, the French colonial regime regularly employed this technique, but an independent nationalist government does not win the support of its population by adopting the colonial method. Compensation to the workers would have averted some frustration, but it was not provided, and failure to supply food, work implements, or transportation increased the burden of resentment. Running the work schedule so close to harvesttime and *Tet* was so objectionable that many peasants, though they risked severe punishment, quit their duties. The overzealous effort of officials to complete the agrovillage revealed an obsessive concern to meet the time schedule set in Saigon, regardless of local conditions.

There is little question that the government operated on a number of naive assumptions. To anticipate "spontaneous" enthusiasm among the peasantry for the agrovilles, to suppose that the "priorities" would, in fact, be meaningful as criteria for choosing the applicants, to expect implementation of so vast a program in three years were all gross miscalculations which suggest that the government had a badly distorted image of reality. The belief that competent cadres for administrative posts would emerge and that ardent, energetic youth would be inspired to rural leadership by the agrovillage program was part of the government's pattern of gross self-delusion. The government in Saigon seemed incapable, too, of understanding that the Viet Cong were winning recruits by means other than fear and terror. The notion that peasants were supporting the Viet Cong in protest against the government did not seem to penetrate to top-level decision-making circles.

Policy implementation suffered badly from overcentralization. Provincial district and local officials, under great pressure to fulfill tasks imposed by higher headquarters, at the same time, feared to communi-

cate criticism, suggestions, or information which would reflect unfavorably upon the preconceptions and programs established above. The administrators at Tan Luoc and Caisan were aware of the deep local opposition to the agrovillage program, but there is no evidence that this was adequately conveyed to the Presidency, or, if it was, that it penetrated. Moreover, the entire relocation process was a heavy-handed bureaucratic operation, directed entirely by government officials and backed by military force. No grass roots political party or movement with popular appeal was available to spark genuine local involvement. The NRM was an official party, staffed largely by functionaries, such as the Binh Minh information officer, and The Republican Youth and the Vietnamese Womens Solidarity Movement were organizations with little voluntary support from the peasantry.

The propaganda campaign to sell the agrovilles was inadequate to overcome the basic limitations in the program. In fact, the Civic Action and information officials probably contributed to the peasants' impression that they were being squeezed by government agents into a repugnant program. Even the best of information techniques would have had insuperable difficulty facing the rapidity of change brought by the agrovilles.

It seems clear that the deteriorating security situation forced cessation of a program which stirred such opposition, although the increased insecurity was not necessarily the fault of the agrovillage program. Heavier guerrilla activity might well have reflected the changed situation in Laos, pressures from Peking, internal factors in North Vietnam, or independent decisions by Viet Cong leadership in South Vietnam. Yet the dependence of the Viet Cong on a measure of cooperation from the peasants, and their skill in exploiting any dissatisfaction, suggest that the Viet Cong had gained additional supporters from those who suffered hardship in the relocation project.

Only as the strategic hamlet plan unfolds will it be possible to determine what the government may have learned from the agrovillage experience. If the commitment to social and economic development which was enunciated with the agrovillage plan is, in fact, fulfilled, and if, this time, the implementation is more effective, the new program could provide a better test of the potential of rural development schemes in winning the peasant population. If the existing agrovilles are ever in the future developed along the lines proclaimed in the original plan, data collected at a later date will be of unusual interest and importance.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Report by Delegation from Binh Minh District of Trip to Observe Agglomeration Centers (*Qui Khu* and *Qui Ap*) at Vy Thuan in Phong Dinh Province

On September 26, 1959, a delegation composed of chiefs of villages, chiefs of police of villages in Binh Minh and an agent of the Information Service of the Civic Action went to visit the *qui khu* and *qui ap* at Vy Thuan, By Thuy and Hoa Luu, in the district of Long My of Phong Dinh Province. The following observations were made concerning the *qui khu* and the *qui ap*:

1. Conditions favorable to the establishment of the *qui khu* and the *qui ap* at Long My:

a. *Geographical situation:*

A flat region in which many habitations are spread out in the plain separated from one another. The administration cannot maintain contact with the inhabitants; that is why it is necessary to establish *qui khu* and *qui ap*.

b. *Security:*

The three villages belong to the battle zone, U Minh, where the Communists have undertaken powerful action. It is for this reason that the method used by the government to react seems rather severe, and when the order was received to create the *qui khu* and *qui ap*, the population had to obey the order to avoid the terrorism.

c. *Material means:*

Long My region is rich in materials (leaves for thatching and wood) for construction. The cost of construction is therefore not high. The population needed only to go out and collect this material in order to construct their homes. They had no real expense. Most of the families grouped in the *qui khu* and *qui ap* have lived from rice culture and gardens and do not have other income. For this reason their transfer is easy.

d. *The site:*

The areas selected: even if the property belonged to individuals, there will not be any complaints from the owners because the Long My region is immense. If several hectares were taken for the *qui khu* and *qui ap*, the loss would be imperceptible for the large landowners.

2. Difficulties encountered:

a. The regrouped families in the *qui ap* say they have committed no crime and yet they are obliged to be transferred, causing them wrong for their work and their pocketbooks, etc.

b. The propaganda was insufficient. The program of the *qui khu* and *qui ap* was a severe one and from the point of view of implementation there was not enough propaganda to explain it. Even the hamlet chiefs committed the error of telling the population in the *qui ap* that they will never be able to return to their former homes. For this reason, these families are discouraged and long for the things they left behind.

3. Program for implementation in Binh Minh: We draw upon the experience we gained from our visit and establish the following plan:

(1) The site chosen for families of the *qui ap*: dispersed families which the government cannot control. These *qui ap* families will be found in the following regions:

- a. Dispersed regions which are located at the frontier of Binh and Sa Dec (villages of Vinh Thoi, Phong Loa, Tan Luoc, Tan Quoi, Than Loi). These families will be grouped along provincial route no. 37.
- b. The regions of Dia Vit, Kinh Pho Chat, in the district of Binh and Tam Dinh (village of Douy Thanh). These families will also be grouped along the provincial road 37 further along.
- c. Region of the hamlet, My Hoa frontier districts Binh Minh and Sa Dec. These will be grouped along the road Cay Loi No. 4.
- d. The region, Rach Vuot, arroyo Cai Chan—hamlet, My An (village My Hoa)—to be grouped along arroyo Thai and arroyo Cai Von.

(2) Place for the *qui khu* families (Viet Cong). These families will be grouped in the zones cited above, but they will be grouped in a separated sector so that the control will be more severe (not mixed with the others). All pro-Communist families who have relatives in the North or who work for the Viet Minh will be grouped in the *qui khu* without distinction as to whether they live in insecure zones or not.

- (3) Method of relaxation:
 - a. Large propaganda to explain the government policy for the administration of *qui khu* and *qui ap*. The population will be worked on so that they make requests to live in the *qui khu* and *qui ap*.
 - b. At the same time of the propaganda, village councils will draw up lists of families to live in the *qui khu* and *qui ap*.
 - c. The place for each family will be indicated. This will be accomplished after the harvest.

APPENDIX II

Report of District Meeting to Organize Agrovillage Work Committees

Decisions of the meeting:

- I. Committees established to direct work in the agrovillage
 - a. *District*: President—chief of district
 Vice President—president of MRN of district
 Members—chief of canton, commander of district civil guard, chief of information of district, chief of section of civic action, chief of district youth organization
 - b. *Village*: *President*—chief of village
 Vice President—president of MRN of village
 Commissioner charged with direction of workers—village chief of police
 Committee in charge—committee of the village youth
 Secretary—commissioner of information of the village
- II. Duties of the above committees
 - a. *District*
 1. Direct the work of the agrovillage
 2. Constitute in each village a committee to direct the work described above
 3. Direct courses of political indoctrination and training for the village
 - b. *Village*
 1. Group together in accordance with the chief of district order
 2. Organize political training in the hamlets
 3. Constitute in each village a committee of encouragement composed of public officials, merchants, landowners, youth organizations, etc.
- III. Plan of action
 - a. *Political training*: Courses will be organized by the assistant chief of province, dates of a one-day training course beginning November 28, to be given at the different echelons, district, village and hamlet are cited. Members of these courses will be members of the committees cited above, such as director of youth organization, hamlet chiefs and sub hamlet chiefs.
 - b. *Recruitment of workers*: Beginning November 30, 1959, the chief of police of Tan Luoc must furnish 500 workers to complete the tasks indicated by the directing committee. Other villages must also prepare workers, and the committees will bring their own tools. Tan Luoc must choose a place for the workers to rest.
- IV. Miscellaneous
 - a. Names of the members of the committee of encouragement are cited.
 - b. Permanent directing committee of the agrovillage: Its mission is to coordinate daily work, control the delivery of cards to workers and report:
 1. President—the lieutenant in charge of the agrovillage
 2. Vice President—chief of police of Tan Luoc
 3. Secretary—civic action agent

APPENDIX III

Summary of District Meeting to Develop Agrovillage Work Plan

1. Calendar of work: the work is divided into three groups, with each group composed of three villages, Group 1: 7-12 to 9-12; 17-12 to 19-12; 28-12 to 30-12. (Other groups follow similar schedules.)
2. Work: In each work period the village chief of police must furnish a contingent of workers according to the following table: Smallest village—300; largest village—800; etc.
3. Responsibility: The chief of canton and a civic action agent are responsible for the number of workers and the maintenance of order.
4. A request is made that the committees of encouragement operate more effectively.
5. Delivery of work cards: Each evening the secretary of the direction committee shall deliver work cards and report to the district.
6. Notes: The work calendar will show in advance the working days so that workers may know their duties well ahead of time and may report to work the preceding evening if they wish. Work officially begins at 0600. Normally, 10 persons will be required to dig 3 meters of canal with a width of 6 meters.

APPENDIX IV

Daily Work Report from Tan Luoc Agrovillage

VINH LONG PROVINCE

BINH MINH DISTRICT

No. 47-PI

PROSPEROUS AREA

OFFICIAL MESSAGE

Date: 3-April 1960. 17.00 hours

From: District Chief of Binh Minh

To: Province Chief of Vinh Long

Please find below a report about the works achieved in the day: 3-April 1960

DESCRIPTION OF WORK	VOLUME OF WORK DONE DURING THE DAY	VOLUME ACCUMU- LATED PRIOR TO THEIR DATE	TOTAL
Earth for highway	210 cubic meters	10.245 cubic meters	10.455 cubic meters
Canal digging	420	19.807	20.227
No. of workers	1.368 people	51,238 people	52,606 people
Volume of earth mounded up	1.417 cubic meters	80.430 cubic meters	81.847 cubic meters
Obstacle, handicap trouble, problem			

APPENDIX V

Interview with Dr. Frank Child, Economist, Michigan State University, May 17, 1960

by

J. J. Zasloff

THE AGROVILLE LABOR FORCE

Evidence suggests that President Diem received a suggestion that workers be paid for their labor at the agroville but he refused, insisting that the work be accomplished by "volunteers." This must be a "self-help" project, he was reported to say.

By using forced labor to construct agrovilles the government is creating new wealth—assuming that these agrovilles are considered worthwhile projects. The construction of new houses, schools, market places, etc. are new wealth. Creating this new wealth uses resources, largely labor and material. One might argue that the workers at the agroville would be idle if not employed at the agroville or would be doing odd jobs such as "taking in each other's wash." By using these laborers one can logically argue that more wealth is created at little sacrifice since what is given up by the laborers is mostly leisure or idleness.

But the "social cost" is high since this is forced labor. This assumes, of course, that the laborers are discontent at being mobilized to work without pay and without food or transportation supplied. Discontent might be reduced by paying the laborers, say, 20 or 30 piastres per day. The government could obtain the necessary piastre funds by using foreign exchange reserves. This would require selling available foreign exchange reserves to local importers, receiving piastres, and paying the laborers. A wage payment would immediately increase the purchasing power of these workers who would in all likelihood spend it rapidly, thereby spreading this money throughout the economy. This would tend to be inflationary, since their work does not increase the supply of consumer goods. However, the inflationary tendency would be offset by an increase in imports provided by the foreign exchange sold to importers. In short, this would mean financing agroville construction by liquidating some claims on abroad.

Note this caution: Using these dollars for agroville construction assumes that this is the best alternative for the use of foreign exchange reserves. One could easily argue that better alternatives are available such as construction of cement factories, textile plants, etc. At present, of course, the alternative to using these external assets for agroville construction is to hold them idle.

Reserves should be kept for two principal purposes: (1) to offset the fluctuations in foreign trade which might result from a drop in the price of rice, seasonal fluctuations, etc. (the ever normal granary idea, providing a working balance to offset disturbing charges); (2) to provide a cushion to protect against a possible fundamental shift in market conditions which would be disturbing to the economy, such as a complete cessation of foreign aid. It has been estimated that the present reserves of Vietnam are over two hundred million dollars. Professor Child believes that Vietnam presently has sufficient reserves to meet all contingencies. As to the agroville, the need for reserves might be less than the need for providing some compensation for the social costs incurred in building the agroville, especially if there is deep resentment over the use of forced labor. It would seem a good idea to use foreign assets to carry out, with less social cost, a project assumed to have merit.

In regard to the dollar reserves, Professor Child feels that it is probably a political blunder on the part of Vietnam to accumulate these reserves in such large quantity. It provides a *prima facie* case for reducing the level of American aid, for arguing that Vietnam's resource need is less than the volume of aid provided in the recent past.

Resources available to Vietnam are the goods and services she produces domestically, plus externally financed imports. The bulk of Vietnam's imports are financed by American aid dollars; in addition, some imports are financed by Vietnam's own foreign exchange earnings (exports). Since 1956 Vietnam's exports have increased while her imports have decreased; the balance of payments deficit has been reduced and simultaneously she has accumulated additional foreign exchange reserves. In short, while U.S. aid finances a major portion of her imports, an increasing share of Vietnam's own export earnings are accumulated as idle foreign exchange balances. Last year alone, Vietnam accumulated 30-35 million dollars of foreign exchange reserves. (This figure is probably understated; it excludes secret reserves and unreported accumulations.)

The political danger for Vietnam is that U.S. aid officials might say, "You are using aid dollars to finance imports while your own dollars (or foreign exchange) earnings are being held idle. You are not using the resources you have. We will meet a case of real need but cannot provide aid when your need is of such minimum urgency that you can accumulate foreign bank balances. A country that uses all its resources and is still in need will receive aid. A country which has idle resources resources apparently does not have much need for aid." An ability to accumulate foreign exchange reserves, to export resources in exchange for idle money, shows that need for aid is reduced.

The Agroville

If part of the two hundred million dollar reserves were used to finance the agrovilles, U.S. permission would not be required. If the agrovillage support were brought under a new aid program, U.S. authorization would be required.

Of course the fundamental way to judge the agrovillage is to weigh its value against its cost. As a value one might cite the advantages for security, productivity, and social satisfaction, such as contentment, happiness, etc. The economic cost for constructing the agrovillage seems relatively low. The major resource is labor, which otherwise probably would be idle except at planting and harvest times. The social cost involved might be higher if people are resentful at the forced labor, and the requirement to leave their homes and rice fields, ancestral tombs, etc. These social costs of course cannot be calculated in purely economic terms.

It would probably be economically unwise to use bulldozers for the construction at the agrovilles. In this economy labor is abundant and capital scarce. Probably it is cheaper to pay laborers than to supply bulldozers. It would be foolish to adopt U.S. techniques to Vietnamese production. In the U.S. capital is cheap and labor is expensive; here the reverse is true. A way to compute the economic cost of the agrovillage would be to determine a wage which would bring workers to their tasks "voluntarily." Of course, it is not sure that even with the current wage one could get workers. Perhaps the Vietnamese worker, if he has sufficient to eat, cherishes his leisure more than extra cash. (The Protestant ethic is not at work here.) It is possible that forced labor is the only method to achieve the job.

APPENDIX VI

Coalition of the Armed Forces of Religious Sects Against Americans and Diem

Chinh Anh, Commander, Company 10

Youth of the Republic

Resident of My Thanh B Hamlet

My Thuan Village, Binh Minh District (Vinh Long)

Faced with the Revolutionary movement of the South which breaks out as a storm, people and the Revolution of the South are trying to give the country-sellers and usurpers Americans and Diem a dreadful kick which will soon decide their fates. The Americans and Diem become more and more isolated from the people everyday and their regime declines and becomes disorganized from day to day. The Americans and Diem no longer have any means to use demagoguery. For, at present the people of the South have already been trained by many sacred years of Revolution of Vietnam, and they have already witnessed the wily and dishonest face of the Americans and Diem.

On their dead-end road to agony, the only means is to use dictatorship and fascism such as killing, beating up, imprisoning and stabbing villagers etc . . . They hope that such actions will suppress the movement and spirit of the Revolution of people. But they are completely wrong—for the Vietnamese people have inherited from their fathers the spirit of Revolution. With the spirit of revolt and unsub-

missiveness, the struggle movement becomes stronger and stronger everyday. The people are determined to smash the war plot by the Americans and Diem in order to attain peace, unification, independence and democracy throughout the country. While facing failure, the Americans and Diem have more dangerous plots. They are building agrovilles everywhere. Agrovilles are big prisons and hells on earth. When these agrovilles are completed, they will concentrate the peace-loving patriotic families and people there in order to exploit their wealth, to draft young men so that they have enough forces to start the invasion war with the North, causing bloody killing among brothers.

At My Thuan, you have proved yourself an efficient servant of the Americans and Diem and you collaborate closely with the hamlet chief everyday.

The young men in the village, due to their poverty which constantly keeps them busy around the house, are always late to their work. At times, you let entire companies remain under the sun, force each young man to buy insignia for 5 piastres a piece, compel them to mount guard regardless of age and illness. You are very efficient in the recruiting of workers for "agrovilles." In this undertaking, you and the hamlet chief accept bribes from people. If anyone who wants to remain home, he will have to pay you privately such as in the fourth collection of pay in lieu of work on March 27, 1960. You have forced hundreds of people (93) to work at Tan-Luoc agrovillage. Some of them who have not yet finished with their farming work, came to you to ask for a cancellation and you threatened them to bring them to the village council to settle the matter and you accepted bribes from those who stayed home. There were people who had to pay you four times in lieu of work. Besides bribes in cash, you and the hamlet secretary accept bribes in kind such as mang cau (some kind of fruit), vegetables, tea, etc. . . .

The New Year of this year, you collaborated closely with the hamlet to carry out plot by the Americans and Diem to impoverish people. In the most critical and urgent situation, the Revolution of the South breaks out. The Revolution and people do not fully recognize the present regime and the reactionary organizations of the Americans and Diem. The Revolution and people, in My Thuan as elsewhere, have taken strong opposition attitudes but you still stubbornly either secretly or in the open, continue to serve the rebels under different forms.

On behalf of the Revolution and people, we, the commanding staff of Company 256 of Battalion Ly Thuong Kiet, once again order you to stop your servant job.

If you violate this order the Revolution and people will not guarantee your life nor your property.

War Zone March 29, 1960

BCH Company 256

— Sealed —

APPENDIX VII

Coalition of the Armed Forces of Religious Sects Against Americans and Diem

Tam-Anh, Secretary of My Thanh B Hamlet

My Thuan Village

Binh Minh District (Vinh Long)

While the situation is critical, the fighting movement of the people becomes stronger and stronger every day. The Americans and Diem without any pity oppress the people; and use dictatorship, one-religion and one-family system to govern the country. While they are entirely isolated from the people, their regime comes to a declining stage right at its very root. At present, the Americans and Diem can only use the barbarian policy, there is no other barbarian policy, that they have not yet recourse to. Hence, this regime is essentially a barbarian and bloody one.

Based on the above situation, the Revolution and people at present do not fully recognize this regime and the various reactionary organizations of the Americans and

Diem. For that reason, the Revolution and people recently have taken some opposition measures at various places and right at My-Thuan that you, undoubtedly, have heard and seen.

In the past that is since the day the hamlet chief paid for his crime, you have many indecent deeds, some time secretly, some other time in the open, hiding from the people and bypassing the Revolution and you have stubbornly continued working for the rebels, to be exact, such as recently tying two draft dodgers then handling over to the Americans and Diem, selling family declaration forms, collecting money from people and at present, you have given the hamlet order to take names and ages of persons in each family to compel people to work at the agrovilles. You collaborate closely with the hamlet, carry out plots against peace by the Americans and Diem, side with landowners in the fixing of rice rentals, force farmers to pay high rentals, and look after rented lands for landowners.

All these above actions which are very detrimental to the Revolution and people, prove that you may be the future hamlet chief, and it would be very dangerous if you did not repent soon.

We, the commanding staff of Company 256 of Battalion Ly Thuong Kiet wholeheartedly warn you so that you can correct yourself and resign immediately from your function as secretary and stop collaborating with rebels. If you still stubbornly do so, you will be entirely responsible in front of the Revolution and people.