Targeting Poor Farmers: Contributions to Rural Development in Thailand

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The Australian Government's
Overseas Aid Program

Targeting Poor Farmers: Contributions to Rural Development in Thailand

- **Highland Agricultural and Social Development Project (Phase II), 1988-93**
- **Thai Australia Agricultural Extension Project, 1992-95**
- **Ubon Ratchathani Land Reform Area Project, 1991-95**

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The content of the report remains the responsibility of the three person evaluation team.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ALRO	Agricultural Land Reform Office, of Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
ARD	Office of Accelerated Rural Development
BAAC	Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives
CAA	Community Aid Abroad
CDD	Community Development Department, Ministry of the Interior
CSC	Civil Service Commission
DIS	Development Information System of HTWD
DLD	Department of Livestock Development, MOAC
DOAE	Department of Agricultural Extension, MOAC
DTEC	Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation, Prime Ministers Office
FST	Field Support Team, local NGO, Ubon Land Reform Area
GAD	Gender and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographical Information System
GOA	Government of Australia
HASD	Highland Agricultural and Social Development Project
Hat Lam Dom Yai	Local people's network in Ubon Land Reform Area
HTWD	Hill Tribe Welfare Division, Department of Public Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
IGA	Income Generating Activity
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IRC	International Research Centre
KPG	Kor Por Gor, Agricultural Data Base

KRA	Key Result Area, AusAID Corporate Plan
LDD	Land Development Department of MOAC
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOAC	Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
MTR	Mid Term Review
NFE	Non Formal Education
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECF	Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (Japan)
PCR	Project Completion Report
PID	Project Implementation Document
PWD	Public Welfare Department, of Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
RTG	Royal Thai Government
SIF	Social Investment Fund
TAAEP	Thai Australia Agricultural Extension Project
TAO	Tambon Administrative Organisation (Sub-district representative government)
TDRI	Thailand Development Research Institute
T&V	Training and Visit, Agricultural Extension Process
ULRAP	Ubon Land Reform Area Project
VRF	Village Revolving Fund
WID	Women in Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aim of Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of three rural development projects in achieving design objectives. We also sought to judge project impact on village family (men and women) and community life, the environment and on the future work of the implementing agencies. Lessons drawn from project experience will be used by AusAID and RTG in designing future projects.

The three projects evaluated were:

- HASD II, Thai-Australia Agricultural and Social Development Project, implemented by the Hill Tribe Welfare Division, Department of Public Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 1988-1993;
- TAAEP, Thai-Australia Agricultural Extension Project, implemented by the Department of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 1991-1995; and
- ULRAP, Ubon Ratchathani Land Reform Area Project, implemented by Agricultural Land Reform Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 1991-1995.

HASD II was the final phase of a large, long-running integrated area development project that sought to improve the lives of hill tribe peoples in northern Thailand and to reduce environmental degradation in the catchments of the country's main irrigation dams. TAAEP was a short project that supported national change in the methods of agricultural extension, tested new methodology in three north central provinces and trained staff in those provinces. ULRAP focused on building the development capacity of local people in north eastern Thailand, demonstrated alternative natural resource management strategies and improved local roads and water supplies.

The performance of projects and elements of projects were assessed using a four level rating system ranging from very high to low. These scores correspond to the AusAID numerical scores of 5 (very high) to 2 (low) used in Activity Monitoring Briefs.

Overall Assessment

The summary ratings of Table S.1 indicate that HASD II and ULRAP performed at expected or reasonable levels, with the community development component of ULRAP performing at high levels. The TAAEP performance was less than expected. This was due, in part, to poor communication between senior project and DOAE staff. Geographical separation contributed to the communication problems. More importantly, TAAEP initial design and early implementation revisions to design, did not understand or respond to changes in high level Department of Agricultural Extension

(DOAE) policy and priorities. This situation was remedied after a mid term review but little time remained.

Table S.1: Summary of Project Performance

	HASD II	TAAEP	ULRAP
Achievement of Objectives	moderate	moderate	high
Impact	moderate	low/moderate	moderate
Sustainability	moderate	low	moderate/high
Replicability	low	low	high/local low/govt
Overall Rating	moderate	low	high

HASD II Performance

HASD II achieved almost all of its objectives at expected or reasonable levels. This is a good performance considering the large scale, complexity of design and difficult social and environmental context of the project.

In agriculture, participatory processes were used to encourage change from upland rice to paddy, vegetable and fruit production and these changes were supported with water and land development, planting materials, advice and input supply. Village Revolving Funds have expanded post-project and many are now effective micro-credit operations. HASD II was not so successful in developing and spreading improved rainfed cropping systems.

Environmental objectives were achieved through effective village land use planning and local regulation and by use of erosion control strips in cropping systems. The intensification of farming onto small irrigated plots has reduced erosion but in larger areas where water is scarce this approach is not feasible. Integrated pest management approaches were not applied to insect control in vegetables and fruit crops and some unwise chemical use continues.

HASD II successfully provided improved health and education services in project villages, built roads and brought hill tribe peoples into planning processes and group activities. Social development would have been accelerated by more attention to cultural differences between ethnic groups and would clearly have benefited from more explicit attention to gender issues. Project training and systems development contributed substantially to increased capacity of the Hill Tribe Welfare Division (HTWD) to deliver and coordinate services.

Impact and Sustainability

HASD II had a positive impact on hill tribe family incomes and well being. It reduced the rate of environmental degradation in parts of the project area and improved physical,

economic and social linkages with the rest of the nation. Greater improvements within rainfed cropping systems would have yielded wider impacts.

HTWD has the technical capacity to continue similar development work in Northern Thailand but lacks budget to maintain services and expand work areas.

TAAEP Performance

TAAEP was implemented over 3.5 years but the initial design and approach to implementation were not consistent with new DOAE policies and priorities. A mid term review and personnel changes refocused work in the final 18 months. This is a very short time in which to make an external contribution to institutional change and it is not surprising that TAAEP outcomes were lower than might reasonably be expected.

TAAEP did contribute to the development of an agricultural database/management information system and geographical information system that underpin present DOAE planning work at national and provincial levels. Staff training also lifted the technical and planning capacity of DOAE in the three project provinces. However, few DOAE field staff showed a clear understanding of how they might use the data they are collecting to deliver better services or improve the lives of farm families. Cooperative rice marketing was successfully introduced and supported with infrastructure and training in one district.

TAAEP gave little explicit attention to gender or environmental issues. A few women's group activities were established but these generally remain reliant on DOAE home economists for support and have not expanded. Only one case was observed where women have used project experience as a step towards wider public life. The diversified farming systems demonstrated were environmentally friendly but have not gained wide acceptance.

Impact and Sustainability

It is clear that the project did contribute to the development of tools that are used throughout the national extension system and that provincial staff training in participatory planning and technical aspects of crop diversification has improved performance in the three provinces. It is also clear that DOAE has more work to do before the current system is fully effective at lower levels. In particular, there is a need for more staff training in the analysis and use of collected data and to test alternative systems of engaging farm families more fully in the extension process. The availability of DOAE budget is adequate to sustain use of extension methodology and the database developed with project assistance.

ULRAP Performance

ULRAP benefited from consistent Australian staffing from design to completion and from an innovative method of collaboration between government, NGO and Australian

staff. Performance in most respects was higher than might reasonably have been expected and these good results were consolidated with the help of post-project funding for continued NGO inputs.

ULRAP had explicit gender and environment objectives and was very successful in strengthening local development capacity and in increasing women's participation and status. Savings groups have grown to the extent that many are now effective self-managed micro-credit providers. Local networks are skilfully accessing provincial and national services and influencing government activity.

The project demonstrated sustainable farming systems but uptake of these systems has been slow. There is a greater awareness of environmental issues in the community generally as a result of the project.

The road and water infrastructure elements were constructed as planned and the roads continue to provide benefits, despite the absence of maintenance.

The Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO), the Australian contractor and the NGO formed an effective project management team. ALRO has applied a similar approach in two other donor-funded projects. However, the project has had little effect on later ALRO routine work, even in other land reform areas in the same province.

Impact and Sustainability

ULRAP has had a high impact on the capacity of local men and women to manage their own affairs, participate in public life and engage in group economic activity, such as savings groups. It has had a moderate impact on the local environment, infrastructure and incomes. It has had a low impact on the way ALRO approaches its task in other land reform areas. This low institutional impact is attributed to lack of funds, lack of appropriate staff, regulations on use of NGOs and, perhaps, on high level policy.

Success in the development of local capacity favours sustainability. However, larger impacts on family incomes and the environment probably require more capital than has been available to local groups to date. If the local groups are strong enough to access the newly created Social Investment Fund, then material benefits may be added to the existing social benefits.

Key lessons from experience in these projects

Design and Implementation

1. Experience in these projects suggests that the features of good design are:

- **explicit objectives and a realistic time frame** for the completion of complex or difficult tasks in social or institutional change. HASD II experience shows that complex projects can succeed if given time, budget and emphasis on training.

The TAAEP experience shows that it is difficult to achieve institutional change in a short time;

- **emphasis on genuine participation by local people (men and women) and close alignment with the current policies and priorities of the main implementing agency.** ULRAP clearly shows the benefits of genuine local participation (including sound gender strategies) and NGO input;
- **design and prompt implementation by the one group** (including local officials and contractors). This seems to favour success when compared to separate design and implementation groups or delayed implementation;
- **phasing out, rather than abrupt cessation of assistance, or, providing lower level follow-up activities.** HTWD staff consider that Australian assistance to HASD II ceased abruptly and reported difficulty in their adjustment to work with fewer resources. In ULRAP the continued AusAID funding of the NGO team helped to consolidate the project outcomes in community capacity.
- **effective monitoring by AusAID.** In some designs environmental, gender, or poverty alleviation objectives are integrated within other objectives and not explicit. **It is necessary to monitor progress towards these objectives, whether explicit or not, through the regular reporting process and to question the contractor or implementing agency if crosscutting issues appear to be neglected.**

Targeting the Poor

2. The three projects each targeted people in poor areas and had poverty alleviation as a priority. They did not explicitly target the poorest villagers. **There is a need to devise practical strategies to increase participation of poorer families and to widen access to benefits.** Increasing skills through training and increasing access to capital or land through stronger VRFs are possible strategies. Assisting migration to areas with better employment prospects through relocation grants or providing educational scholarships for children of the very poor are other possible strategies.

Gender

3. ULRAP had a substantial impact on **women's participation, status and public roles.** This impact was achieved by a strategy of starting in women's groups to build confidence and moving promptly to encourage women's participation in mainstream development or local government activities. **The impact of effective *gender* strategies was that the level of local development capacity was raised more quickly and the balance of local decision making was improved, compared to the likely rate of progress with male-centred strategies.**

Environment

4. **Village participatory land use planning can be used to protect water and forest resources where the immediate needs of people are met.** For example, development of small scale irrigation allows **people to see the longer term benefits to their village** from better conservation of soil, water or forest resources. **Conversely, it is difficult to make progress towards *environmentally sustainable land* use where farm families are desperately poor.**

5. **Strategies that rely on concentration of farming activity in smaller, higher value enterprises,** such as vegetables or fish ponds, **can have a marked positive impact on the environment in that farm or village. However, these strategies do not seem to be widely replicable to larger areas without good access to water.** To spread environmental impact more widely, it is necessary to **develop improved rainfed farming systems that are farmer friendly, income friendly and environmentally sustainable.** These systems remain elusive but the search should continue in closer cooperation with ACIAR and IRCs.

Institutional

6. HASD II had a substantial impact on the later work of HTWD; TAAEP contributed tools and skills that DOAE now uses but ULRAP had little impact on the later routine work of ALRO. It seems that ***institutional impact*** **on government agencies depends on the duration of the project, the rapport between project staff and agency leaders and on the quality of training provided. It also depends on maintenance of high level policy that favours the agency retaining official responsibility and resources for the kind of work or approach developed within a project.**

Incomes

7. **A large increase in community development capacity generally, in leadership skills and the status and roles of women and access to Government services, does not automatically and promptly lead to substantial increase in *family income*.** In the long run increased community capacity is expected to lead to better lives and higher income but this often requires wider adoption of more productive and environmentally sound farming systems, better markets or new, profitable non-farm enterprises. The projects were only modestly successful in facilitating access to investment capital needed for these changes.

Sustainability

8. The good results of the ULRAP and HASD II projects are not being extended widely due to lack of government resources or rigidity in operating systems. Whilst the development of new approaches is always resource intensive, **project design and later year implementation should give increased attention to**

simplified or lower input approaches that may be more widely replicable. Gradual phasing out of Australian assistance or follow up (perhaps NGO or training support) activities may also help to focus later project years towards more sustainable methods.

Most of these lessons are common sense and have also been drawn from other AusAID projects. Budget and other implementation pressures or the need to compromise with local priorities usually explain why the lessons are not applied. The inclusion of summary lessons in contractor terms of reference and more structured monitoring would reduce repetition of poor options.

Two issues deserve more consideration.

Observation on Targeting the Very Poor

Each project targeted poor regions and poor villages within the region. The three projects did not explicitly target very poor families within these villages nor were they effective in directly reaching the very poor, with the partial exception of the ULRAP school lunch program.

There are two topical approaches to poverty alleviation. Recent World Bank analysis (World Bank 1998b) suggests that countries with policies that favour strong growth in GDP also reduce poverty at a higher rate than countries with low GDP growth. This approach is supported by considerable empirical evidence. The poor manage to form linkages with the higher growth and income sectors through seasonal construction employment or improved access to stronger markets for higher value products, like fruit and vegetables. These processes can be facilitated by construction of rural feeder roads and freeing up private traders. Social safety nets or Social Investment Funds can be used to deaden the pain during the transitional phase. None of this is new in Thailand and is an exact description of the HASD II experience, where a few poor farmers became rich by supplying urban markets with vegetables and global markets with coffee, grown on project developed small scale irrigation. One interpretation of this approach is that it is unnecessary to target poorer rural people – just grow quickly and the poor will themselves access part of the wealth created (similar to the 'trickle down' theory of three decades ago).

It is true that several decades of strong economic growth in Thailand reduced rural poverty and that the recent sharp contraction will increase rural poverty. Nevertheless, even during periods of rapid economic growth, substantial numbers of very poor rural households persisted. These households tended to be those without land, with poor agricultural land relying on rainfed rice or to be households headed by women who could not so easily migrate for seasonal or urban work.

The second main approach to poverty alleviation is that promoted by many NGOs and supported by socially and environmentally sensitive urban elites in Thailand and

elsewhere. This is to empower local communities, thereby increasing their capacity to mobilise local resources and to access government services. It is also common to work to reduce village reliance on external inputs, such as fertiliser, and on cash crops or marketed outputs. This approach is often accompanied by a heightened awareness of the importance of conservation of the environment. ULRAP is an example of skilled and vigorous application of this approach and it has helped middle and upper income villagers. Unfortunately, again, it is very difficult to empower the very poor as their situation means they must place a higher priority on their next meal rather than on the long term health of the land.

Observation of the three cluster projects suggests that a middle course, between the two above approaches - 'the market will take care of everything' and 'withdraw from the market and use strong social welfare and subsidies for the poor' - is desirable. Experience in these projects suggests that there should be some targeting of the very poor or they are unlikely to benefit directly from project activities. This could be achieved by requiring design teams to propose strategies for the very poor in much the same way that they have to give attention to gender and the environment.

It is very difficult to devise effective strategies to help the very poor. Such strategies should be independent of land ownership and yield reasonable returns for the labour of poor men and women. Increasing skills through education and training and increasing access to capital or land through stronger micro-credit programs are worthwhile strategies. Others could include assisting migration to areas with better employment prospects through relocation grants or housing support. Improving nutrition and providing educational scholarships for children of the very poor are other approaches that succeeded in the Ubon project. In some places livestock distribution and repayment in kind schemes are also successful in targeting people with little or no land.

AusAID should give greater attention to this issue. If such strategies are confirmed as effective in a wider sample of projects then specific, sustainable strategies should be identified and applied in future projects. In the absence of such strategies it is likely that the general experience of these projects will be repeated - low participation by the very poor and low impact on their situation.

Impact on Incomes and the Environment

Two of the projects had a moderate impact on family incomes (home consumption and cash) and the environment but only in locations where major land use change was possible (often where there was water development for vegetables, fruit trees or fish ponds). The majority of families in the project areas continue to depend on rainfed rice and upland crops for their subsistence and cash needs. Aggregate changes in land use are difficult to quantify but are considered small. Hence incomes continue to fluctuate mainly according to rice yields and prices (to a lesser extent input prices) and with availability or access to off-farm work.

If projects are to have a wider impact on family incomes and the environment, designers and managers will have to be more successful in understanding and improving the dominant farming systems and land use patterns in poor areas. These are nearly always rainfed systems. The problems of rainfed farming have been addressed in the work of several International Research Centres and in some ACIAR projects. Closer linkages with ACIAR and IRC research would provide a better technical base for rainfed farming systems that improve both family income and the environment. In these projects the linkages that existed between the projects and ACIAR or IRC research were informal and indirect.

1 INTRODUCTION

This cluster evaluation covers three rural development projects that were implemented in Thailand in the early to mid-1990s:

- **HASD II,** Thai-Australia Agricultural and Social Development Project, implemented by the Hill Tribe Welfare Division, Department of Public Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 1988-1993.
- **TAAEP,** Thai-Australia Agricultural Extension Project, implemented by the Department of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 1991-1995.
- **ULRAP,** Ubon Ratchathani Land Reform Area Project, implemented by Agricultural Land Reform Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 1991-1995.

The aim of the evaluation is to allow AusAID and the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to assess the effectiveness of each project in achieving project design objectives and to make a qualitative assessment of likely sustainability. The evaluation team also sought to judge project impact on village family (men and women) and community life, the environment and on the future work of the implementing agencies. Lessons drawn from project experience will be used by AusAID and RTG in designing future projects. The Terms of Reference (TOR) are attached as Appendix 1. The TOR provide that the 'concentration (in reporting) will be on lessons learned and how rural development projects can be better designed and implemented in the future'. A desk study of project documents was completed in Canberra in October 1998 and the proposed evaluation approach was discussed with the evaluation Advisory Group.

Evaluation field work was completed during three weeks in November 1998 by a team comprising three consultants (two Australian, one Thai), assisted by three AusAID staff and two DTEC representatives, for part of the field work. Each implementing agency provided strong field support for the evaluation team and made staff available for consultation. This assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Two observations on the field work experience may assist future evaluations:

- the late addition of a Thai woman consultant proved extremely beneficial in increasing the capacity and balance of the team; and
- the field work group became very large at times when accompanied by line agency staff and this sometimes reduced our ability to gather villager opinions informally or from people outside leadership groups.

Methodology

The design of each project gave substantial attention to monitoring and reporting progress and much data were collected and reported. In theory this evaluation should contain quantitative analysis of outcomes and impacts. In practice, about three years after project completion, the team found it difficult to access relevant, complete data sets in the time available. We relied mainly on Project Completion Reports for a description of what was achieved during the project and cross-checked this by discussion with villagers and line agency or NGO staff.

The performance of projects and elements of projects were assessed using a four level rating system ranging from very high to low. These scores correspond to the AusAID numerical scores of 5 (very high) to 2 (low) used in Activity Monitoring Briefs.

So far as impact is concerned, the assessments in this report are team judgements based on discussion with participants. In the case of HASD II, the value of a 'project completion impact survey' of 1000 households is confounded by changes in sample households and areas from earlier surveys, and a lack of information on changes in non-project areas over the same time. Moreover, staff now responsible for maintenance of the HASD II Development Information System (DIS) were unable to extract more detailed social data, such as gender disaggregated training or participation data, from DIS in the few days available. It was not clear whether this reflects inadequate training or flaws in the DIS system. Similar data problems were encountered in the other projects.

The report first considers each project separately under the main headings of achievement of objectives, impact on income, community development and participation, environment and institutions, sustainability and lessons learned. The crosscutting issues of gender and the environment are then covered in Chapters 5 and 6 and the central output of the evaluation is presented in Chapter 7, cluster lessons.

2 EVALUATION OF THE HIGHLAND AGRICULTURAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, PHASE II

Table 2.1: Summary of Performance and Impact, HASD II Project

Objective	Achievement of Objectives	Impact			
		Social	*Institutional*	*Income*	*Environment*
1. Agric/environ.					
Wise land use	moderate (high+water, low rainfed)				moderate
Less slash/burn	moderate/low				low
Watershed mangt.	high				moderate
High crop prodvty.	moderate			moderate	
Revolving funds	high	moderate		moderate	
Partic. process	moderate	moderate			moderate
2. Social					
Health	high	high			
Education	high	high			
Plan partic.	moderate	moderate			
Group activities	moderate	moderate		low	
Civic rights	moderate	moderate			
Infrastructure	moderate			moderate	
3. Institutional					
Training staff	high		High		
Training farmers	high	high		moderate	moderate
Mangt systems /Institnlise process	moderate		Moderate		

2.1 Project Background

HASD II consisted of a final, five year phase of a lengthy, integrated area development project. It was implemented in an inaccessible area of Northern Thailand, peopled by a diverse range of tribal groups not well integrated into the Thai nation and with some continuing opium production and residual drug dependency. The project addressed a wide range of development constraints at a large scale. Phase II targeted a population of 50 000 people living in 273 villages in 6 provinces and continued Phase I operations in the original 5 provinces, 306 villages and 52 000 people. A total of 102 000 people in 579 villages were targeted in a difficult social and physical environment. Several other projects with similar objectives were being implemented in separate hill tribe areas at the same time as HASD II. Information was exchanged between HASD, Royal projects, Thai-German, UN and CARE USA projects.

Australian Phase II expenditure was about A$14.8 million with RTG expenditure equivalent to A$ 8.5 million, at 1994 exchange rates. The Thai input was largely the responsibility of the Hill Tribe Welfare Division (HTWD) of the Public Welfare Department, although some health and education inputs were channelled through the relevant line agencies. A large part of the Australian input was focused on technical assistance for agricultural development and project management and monitoring. To the knowledge of the evaluation team, AusAID has not funded another rural project of this scale or complexity since HASD II was completed in 1993. Table 2.2 illustrates the focus of Australian inputs on agriculture and the environment and management, even within Phase II, which was 'refocused towards social development'.

Table 2.2: Personnel Input into HASD II in Person Months

	Australian Advisers	Thai Staff and Specialists	Extra HTWD Staff
Agricultural Development	231	36	468
Social Development	25	8	348
Institutional Support	2	60	324
Management/Monitoring	151	6	156

Source: HASD II PCR.

2.2 Achievement of Objectives

Project Design

The final HASD phase was prepared with the benefit of some ten years experience in Phase I and knowledge of government and other donor experience in similar projects in adjacent areas. The design was presented concisely in logframe format with clear relationships between activities, expected outputs and four purpose-level objectives:

- to introduce permanent farming systems to minimise damage to the environment and increase farm production for food and/or sale;
- to improve the social conditions of the target group and increase the opportunities for them to participate in development programs;
- to strengthen the capacity of the HTWD to carry out its operations; and
- to encourage line agencies to carry out their role in development of highland people.

The agricultural and environmental objectives had received priority in Phase I, and Phase II increased attention to social issues. It is not clear why road and water infrastructure activities were seen as part of the social component, except that it may have been assumed that such investments would originate from the participatory planning

processes. In contrast the Village Revolving Funds (VRFs) were presented in the agriculture component as input supply mechanisms.

Overall, the design presented a clear set of economic, social and environmental objectives and provided for sets of activities that might reasonably have been expected to lead to achievement of those objectives. There was minimal revision of the design at mid-term review (MTR), with the important exception that the MTR noted the lack of attention to gender issues in the design and proposed measures to ensure compliance with Women in Development (WID) policy of the time and to yield better outcomes for women in project activities.

Appropriate performance indicators were proposed (with the exception of gender disaggregation) and resources allocated to data collection and the creation of a Development Information System (DIS) database.

2.2.1 Achievement of Agricultural and Environmental Objectives

Agricultural

The project was successful in facilitating change away from upland rice and maize towards paddy, vegetable, fruit and coffee production systems in many villages. This was achieved by use of a participatory planning process with project capacity to respond to farmer requests for assistance with water and land development, demonstrations, planting materials and subsidised inputs. Farmer interviews make clear the radical nature and extent of change in their behaviour over the past decade and believe that this intensification process has given them higher, more stable incomes. TDRI (1994) reports net income of 25 000 Baht/rai in HASD II villages with vegetable-field crop cropping systems compared to small negative incomes with the traditional field crop or rice-field crop rotations. One farmer interviewed reported purchase of a pick-up truck with the proceeds of the first two years vegetable growing. Another farmer reported that 2.5 rai of project irrigated rice now met family needs whereas some 17 rai of rainfed rice were needed in the past. While project activity was not the only factor supporting these changes, it was clearly an essential element . Urban economic growth and private sector marketers also contributed to the changes.

The techniques used in vegetable production seem appropriate with the exception of pesticide strategies (discussed below). Water shortages restrict fruit production in many places.

The project was not so successful in facilitating change in rainfed cropping systems. To this day farmers remain reluctant to incorporate legumes or use fertiliser in rainfed crop situations. The general view seems to be that uncertain rainfall and markets increase the risk that more or different inputs or crops will not yield acceptable returns. These risks deter most rainfed farmers from changing from rainfed rice grown traditionally. The only

changes widely observed in rainfed villages were use of new rice varieties and some fruit tree planting in wetter areas. ACIAR and IRC research programs continue to add technical knowledge on rainfed systems. Future projects would likely benefit from more formal relationships with such research programs.

VRFs must be counted as one of the major project achievements. VRFs were established as a means of providing sustainable supply of fertiliser and other crop inputs. They began with in-kind supply from project funds and with careful monitoring and good repayment performance, have expanded rapidly post-project. Many are now managed largely by village committees and continue to operate successfully. In most cases the funds have expanded several fold (Table 2.3).

Environmental

Grass contour strips are widely accepted by farmers as a practical means of controlling soil erosion. Vetiver is the preferred species in current plantings and new strips are continuing to be established. This is despite earlier experience with invasive species that are now considered major weeds. (Project staff insist the worst weeds came from a livestock grazing experiment in the Thai Australia Highlands Agricultural Project and not from HASD grass strips).

Table 2.3: Growth in Village Revolving Funds

Fund Purpose	Fund Value (Baht Million)		Participation, 1998	
	1993	1998	Whole 14 Provinces	
1. Project Area	Six Provinces		Number Funds	Number Families
Economic	6.7	14.9	558	24544
Social	0.5	12.4	478	36612
Welfare	-	5.0	763	50968
Sub-Total	7.4	32.3		
2. Other provinces	Eight Provinces			
Economic	-	4.3		
Social	-	0.9		
Welfare	-	3.4		
Sub-Total	-	8.6		
3. Total	**7.4**	**40.9**		

Source: HTWD records.

The second major contribution to environmental conservation comes through

watershed demonstrations and the participatory village land use plans that establish reserves for water and forest conservation. Mini watershed development was completed in 24 villages under HASD II and is now being implemented in a further 48 villages in other areas.

An independent study (TDRI, 1994) covering project and other areas concluded that:

> …intensification of highland agriculture can reduce land requirement...allowing degraded forests to regenerate...(this) is related to the productivity of the new, more productive cropping systems…

The same study also noted degradation in other areas where economic success led to destructive expansion of the new systems. This has not happened in project areas due to labour constraints and the strength of local planning resolve.

The only adverse environmental effect noted was the widespread use of pesticides on vegetable and fruit crops. The project did not give much attention to Integrated Pest Management (IPM) or other approaches to limiting pesticide use. Farmers are aware of potential hazards and have visited organic and IPM demonstration farms in adjacent lowland areas. However, it is beyond the capacity of local staff and people to quickly adapt or devise systems that protect crops without harming health and the environment.

In summary, the project achieved most of the agricultural and environmental objectives, leading to increases in village income and food security. These increases were very substantial in villages where water development allowed permanent cropping of paddy, fruit trees and dry season vegetables. They were much smaller, but positive, in dry rainfed cropping villages.

2.2.2 Achievement of Social and Community Development Objectives

The evaluation team interviewed a small number of people out of the large project area population. This sample rarely included the landless. The views below are based on village interviews, and discussion with Hill Tribe researchers and project staff.

The purpose of this component was to improve social conditions through activities that aimed to produce six outputs:

Output 1: Improved health/sanitation services

It was not possible to investigate all these issues, but generally there have been noted improvements in villager health, reasonably attributable to the project's activities.

There was some apparent connection between the provision of potable drinking water and improved health, and reduced burden on women for water collection. According to HTWD data, the percentage of people in the project drinking clean water had increased from 7 per cent before the project (1989) to 74 percent at the end of the project (1992).

The percentage of people in the project using latrines had not increased noticeably over the same period. However, the percentage of people in the project supplied with improved medical facilities had increased markedly from 37 to 94 percent.

Inevitably, health may also have been adversely affected by the improvement in infrastructure. HIV-AIDS was noted as a more recent problem, blamed largely on transmission by men returning from urban centres.

Output 2: Improved education services

In general, there have been noted improvements in education services both directly and indirectly as a result of project activities. Formal primary education is widely available in the larger established villages. Literacy rates have increased twofold in some villages since the project's inception due to a combination of factors including improved communication, education programs, teacher support, and materials. According to HTWD data, the percentage of eligible children attending primary school had increased from 39 percent before the project in 1989 to 70 percent at the end of the project in 1992. However, these figures could also be attributable to education agency targeting, as villages became formally established.

Output 3: Increased opportunities for participation in planning

The project (which covered some 20 per cent of all tribal communities in the north of Thailand) was clearly able to strengthen the organisational capacity among some social groups and increase their development planning participation, particularly in the last three years of the project.

Initially, the problem-census approach to participation appears to have been agency-driven and its success depended heavily on the skills of the interviewers. However, with staff and villager experience, the participatory process appeared to improve in latter project years. According to HTWD data, the number of villages with local-level participatory development plans increased from 58 per cent before the project in 1989 to all villages by the end of the project.

HTWD data also shows some 70 per cent of villages in the project zones conducted problem-census meetings and that an average of 53 per cent of all men and 29 per cent of all women attended the meetings. Among the nine tribal groups plus the lowland Thai in the project area, it was shown that female participation depended on the ethnic group. The highest incidence of participation was found among women in the matrilineal and matrilocal Karen villages (40 per cent of women) and the lowest levels found among the patrilineal/patriarchal Hmong villages (14 per cent of women). This indicates that participation, given the conditions at the time, was reasonable but selective and, especially in the case of female participation, depended on cultural and language constraints.

There was a tendency in HASD II, and HTWD work generally, to ignore ethnicity and cultural diversity by applying general approaches to planning and work systems to all hill tribe people. The design and implementation of HASD II would have been improved by greater recognition of cultural diversity in the ability of human actors to change and the nature of constraints to change within various ethic groups.

Many of the poorest 20 per cent of the population (often landless) were not active participants in project activities. However, the data supports the contention that both men and women's participation in planning and implementing project activities increased during the life of the project and was clearly higher, in quantity and quality, in Phase II than in Phase I.

Output 4: Improved community and group activities

The PCR reported that 480 groups had been established and that some 70 per cent of households belong to one or more village organisations. The evaluation did not detect marked change in participation rates. The Village Revolving Funds (VRFs) were the most successful community group established by the project. They assist the community to solve input credit problems and have continued to grow post-project. VRFs are limited in scope due to financial constraints and in some cases they also tend to be dominated by families connected with village committees and with larger landowners. The VRFs visited by the evaluation team appeared to be managed competently and were operating in the interests of all members.

Other group activities include community land use planning. In about 24 villages, watershed management and forest conservation committees successfully applied participatory techniques to reach consensus to protect sensitive water and remnant forest resources.

Women's income generation groups are a further example of progress towards this objective. About 21 per cent of households had women members of groups operating shops, handicraft and food processing groups and livestock production activities. In contrast to ULRAP there were few women-only Savings Groups.

In summary, the project was successful in forming and supporting a wide range of groups, many of which have continued to operate post-project.

Output 5: Increased access to civic rights

In the case of citizenship, HTWD data suggests that two-thirds of the total project villagers now have citizenship, with the highest rate found in Lamphun Province. However, the process of gaining citizenship is slow and the Department of Local Administration (Ministry of Interior) limited in its resources. Factors outside project control clearly set the rate of progress towards this objective.

Output 6: Improved infrastructure

The evaluation team used several project roads and observed project-built domestic and irrigation water facilities and noted that these were generally in reasonable condition and regular use. Village committees are responsible for maintenance and appear to cover light maintenance reasonably well. Major washouts that require heavy equipment for repair must await Government budget and attention. The evaluation team lacked the skills and time needed for comprehensive assessment of all project infrastructure. The 115 km of access track and 300 km of motorcycle track constructed were mainly built with RTG funds and construction capacity, with 3 months Australian technical assistance. Australian infrastructure funding was focused on land and water development.

Overall, the project appeared to make reasonable to good progress towards the social objectives, with some reservations on participation by the poorest villagers.

2.2.3 Achievement of Institutional Objectives

The purpose of the institutions component was to 'strengthen the capacity of HTWD'. Achievements against each output are described below.

Output 1: Trained staff and farmers

Staff

Former project staff were interviewed about their involvement in the project, the training they received and their present position. These staff varied from key village leaders to a director of a provincial centre. These discussions indicated that project training generally was sufficient for staff to do their project work and that the knowledge and skills gained are still being used. Areas identified where training could have been better included planning, monitoring and evaluation and information systems. Better knowledge of how to use data base information and how to evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing HTWD work would have been valuable.

An indication of the effectiveness of staff training was obtained from a comparison of staff working in non-project centres with those in project centres. Ex-project staff claimed that it was more difficult to expand project activities into non-project centres because staff of these centres did not have the necessary capabilities. Project training introduced the concept of 'train the trainers' and this was a key element of the development of knowledge and skills under the project. One former staff member is now head of the Human Resources Division of PWD.

Farmers

Output 2: Improved Planning, M&E and Information Systems

The project introduced systems for bottom-up planning, reporting on project progress (M&E) and collecting and storing data on project villages. The planning system involved

villagers in problem analysis and identification of development activities that were consolidated up to project level for funding decisions. In a similar way M&E and village data collection systems used the project structure (villages, zones and provinces) to collect and consolidate information for the project.

Output 3: Institutionalisation of Key Project Procedures

This output appears to have been achieved. Key project procedures (see systems above) are still being used to varying degrees of effectiveness.

Output 4: Publicised HTWD/Project Activities

No specific attempt was made to assess this output but there appeared to be a reasonable level of awareness about the project among local line agencies, academic institutions and people of nearby villages.

2.2.4 Achievement of Line Agency Component Objectives

The purpose of the line agencies component was to 'encourage line agencies to work in the hills'. This was meant to address the situation where agencies such as Agriculture, Education and Health did not work in Hill tribe areas as they considered this to be the exclusive responsibility of the Hill Tribe Welfare Division of the Department of Public Welfare. Achievements against this component's outputs were assessed as follows:

Output 1: Potential line agency inputs determined

No attempt was made to assess this output.

Output 2: Line agency activities coordinated

At the time of the evaluation there was some evidence of increased line agency activity in the hill tribe areas. This was based on discussion with a health department worker and the view of village people that health and education services had improved. There was also evidence that the Health and Education Departments cooperated with HTWD through accessing village relating to health care and education needs. Indications are that the Department of Agricultural Extension has not increased its activities in the hills.

2.3 Project Impact

2.3.1 Family Income

Wherever project activity, natural resources and market access combined to enable change in land use away from upland rice towards paddy, vegetable, fruit tree or coffee farming systems, very large increases in family income were apparent. DIS data show annual family income increasing from B11 000 in 1992 to B35 680 in 1996 for project areas and from B15 000 to B18 854 in non-project areas for the same years. It was not

possible to verify this data but simple observation and farmer discussion in this type of village supports the DIS results. An independent study (TDRI, 1994) also indicated project success in devising profitable, intensive farming systems.

In contrast, in villages where upland rice remains the main farming activity there has been only limited increase in incomes. Continuous rice cropping (without fallow) without external inputs is leading to lower yields and continued land degradation. Even farmers in this situation reported higher incomes earned through small numbers of project-supplied fruit trees grown in favoured sites throughout the villages.

Each farm family interviewed in project villages reported improved living conditions compared to those existing ten years ago. While part of this improvement is clearly attributable to factors unrelated to HASD II, most villagers indicate a linkage between project outputs, such as roads, new crops or VRFs, and improved living conditions. Villagers in the single non-project village visited reported that their lives had deteriorated or remained stable over the same time.

2.3.2 Environmental Impact

Field observation suggests that the project-initiated changes towards permanent farming systems have persisted, without undue expansion, and that the overall effect of changes in farming systems has been to reduce soil erosion. A reduction in run-off and increased highland water consumption implies reduced availability of water for lowland rice. In a dry year such as 1998 reduced water availability in the lowlands is a sensitive issue. Reduced lowland water availability may be an unintended consequence of improved highland land use patterns but it is in everyone's long term interest to reverse highland environmental degradation.

The team attempted to obtain stream flow and sediment load data at appropriate points so as to permit quantitative assessment of project impact on soil erosion and catchment water yield. Similarly GIS data would have permitted ready calculation of aggregate changes in annual and permanent cropping systems. It was not possible to access such data in the limited time available for evaluation.

The failure to develop acceptable, improved rainfed cropping systems and continued pressure on land in upland areas mean that forest, soil and water degradation will continue in upland areas. While further investment in water and road infrastructure could shift some more land towards tree crops, wider impact on land conservation will await the development of low-input rainfed cropping systems that give farmers secure, high incomes from smaller areas. At present such technology is not locally available or has not been demonstrated in acceptable systems.

The poorly targeted use of pesticides on project area vegetable and fruit crops is most likely having an adverse health impact on people and animals in project and nearby villages. The situation is not monitored and quantitative data are not available but the areas

and quantities involved are probably less than that needed to cause wider regional damage in these large catchments. However, there is a strong need for HTWD agricultural staff to work more closely with the private sector purchasers of vegetables and the farmers, to reduce pesticide use and to introduce the concept of Integrated Pest Management.

Overall, the project has had a positive impact on the environment but the unsolved problem (here and elsewhere) remains how to improve rainfed farming so that larger areas are farmed sustainably. The existing strategy of changing to small-scale irrigation and so reducing pressure on nearby rainfed areas has a high impact in some locations but is not applicable in the larger areas, where water resources are inadequate.

2.3.3 Institutional Impact

The evaluation team assessment of present HTWD capacity suggests that the project has had a high impact on the ability of the Division to help hilltribe people improve their way of life. This applies particularly to the way staff approach their work and the knowledge and skills they have to carry it out.

Many staff trained under the project now have positions of authority in other parts of HTWD and claim that they apply the knowledge and skills gained from the project in their daily work. Nine of HTWD's 14 provincial centres are now headed by ex-project staff and two staff have senior positions in Bangkok (one worked previously in Chiang Mai and the other in the Bangkok project office).

HTWD has made an effort to expand the management systems introduced by the project to provinces, centres and villages which were previously outside the project. Shortage of staff with the necessary skills and operating budget have hampered this expansion to some extent. One provincial centre director who had previously been on the project thought that the bottom-up planning system was about 70 per cent as effective as at the time of the project.

A small number of individual villagers were asked about the bottom up planning system but there was very little awareness of village planning meetings among this group. However, HTWD staff working at key village level were able to explain its operation.

The information system (DIS) introduced by the project has been expanded beyond the information needs of project management to provide information required for development planning. It now covers all 14 provinces where HTWD operates and data analysis work has been devolved to provincial centres. There is some limitation on the use of the data for planning, perhaps because there are insufficient staff with the knowledge and skills to access the information. Comprehensive quantitative descriptions of life in project villages is said to exist in the DIS for 1992 and 1996. The evaluation team had difficulty in accessing DIS information but we could not determine whether this was because the system is difficult to use or poorly maintained, because staff lack required skills or because we gave insufficient notice of the data we sought.

2.4 Sustainability

Institutional Capacity and RTG Recurrent Funding

To date, the improvements in HTWD's institutional capacity appear to be reasonably sustainable. The impact on daily work of the Division has been maintained at a reasonable level since the end of the project. Whether this continues will depend on the Division's ability to provide adequate refresher training and budget to meet the needs of the more staff-intensive approaches introduced by the project. At this stage it appears likely that limited budget will reduce institutional sustainability but that, overall, benefits will continue at a reasonable level.

HTWD staff claimed that the project ended too abruptly and that sustainability would have been better had there been more of a phase out period to assist HTWD to adjust to the post project situation. What HTWD needed before the end of the project was a clear strategy on how to continue the work with reduced resources and how to help line agencies to take over responsibility. The Australian assistance was cut off assuming that HTWD would be able to continue with the same level of resources and this was clearly incorrect even without the current financial crisis. There would have been value in training project staff in ways of operating under a situation of reduced budget and staffing.

After the project was completed HTWD attempted to continue development activities more or less in line with project processes. However, it soon became clear that the RTG budget was lower after the project than during the project and that in the absence of supplementary Australian funds, it would be necessary to modify processes and use a less intensive approach. More recently, as the government's financial situation deteriorated, a further 30 percent budget reduction occurred. Information provided by HTWD staff indicated that, since the beginning of the financial crisis, spending on infrastructure, training and staff travel has been cut substantially but that budgets for health and education have been maintained.

In short, HTWD has the necessary skills to continue or extend HASD development work but is severely constrained by lack of budget.

Environmental

The land use planning systems and permanent farming systems and techniques introduced by the project appear likely to be sustainable in the long term, with some modification of approach to pest control. The permanent systems are financially robust (with private sector linkages) and this seems to be a precondition for farmer acceptance of forest and watershed protection. In other words, once farm family incomes rise and become more stable (for example, through small scale irrigation/vegetable production) farmers are more amenable to consideration of longer term environmental issues and those issues are more likely to be seen to directly affect their own water supply.

In contrast, in the upland areas where water development has not occurred, families depend on traditional rainfed rice techniques. Here the project techniques of crop diversification, grass strips and so on have not yet been welded into a sustainable improved cropping system. There is not enough rice grown to feed families in the project area and all villages visited do purchase rice from outside.

Social and Community

In some villages the VRFs may form a sound base for a micro-credit system that mobilises local savings as well as funds crop input needs. This kind of change may be needed for longer term sustainability but to date the VRFs have met project objectives and stimulated the development of commercial management skills and community activity within many villages. Some of the women's income generation groups also continue to play a role in developing leadership skills and fostering community cohesion, with limited continuing support from NGOs and HTWD.

Conservation areas remain in place with local, effective regulation in several villages visited. Again, these initiatives seem more secure in villages where water development and high value, crop intensification have eased pressure on land. They are not so evident where farmers have little access to water or high value crops and are forced to plant as much land as labour permits to upland crop.

Overall sustainability is high from most perspectives within the project area. Although HTWD has the necessary skills to apply a similar development approach in other Hill Tribe areas, it lacks other needed resources, especially budget. From this perspective, greater institutional sustainability would have resulted from development of less intensive methods to achieve project objectives. The other area in which sustainability is lower concerns rainfed cropping systems and villages that rely heavily on rainfed rice, without water development prospects. The lack of improved, sustainable rainfed cropping systems means that environmental and income benefits are unlikely to continue to flow in those areas as population increases.

2.5 Project Lessons

The project contributed to Highland development in two phases over a period of about 15 years. It began with an emphasis on agricultural technology and concluded by giving increased attention to community group formation, consultation and social infrastructure and services.

It is clear that the project increased the technical and operational capacity of HTWD, the ability of villagers to participate in development (manage revolving funds, operate committees) and facilitated trends towards high value, permanent cropping systems (where water is available). Despite general criticism of large, integrated area development projects (World Bank 1997), the scale and complexity of design, the bias towards agricultural technology and the failure to solve problems within rainfed cropping systems, HASD II

managed to achieve most of its objectives and left behind a Thai institution (HTWD) better able to support Hill Tribe people in their efforts to improve well being, and to stabilise declining environmental conditions. The approach developed was resource intensive for both the Australian and Thai Governments. A key question is whether similar results could have been achieved with a more concise, different set of investments? A comparison of the ULRAP and HASD approaches may help to answer that question.

Lessons

Design and Implementation

1. The **long duration** of the project (including Phase I) and **strong training element** contributed to success in building HTWD capacity. Although the design is complex and includes many activities there is no evidence to suggest that this had an adverse effect on project outcomes. The project worked with **one agency** that had **lead responsibility for all Government development activity** in the project area. It may be that the training, extended duration and HTWD focus of this project allowed satisfactory implementation of a complex project design. **In short, if the development context requires a comprehensive set of inputs then considerable time (ten or more years) will be needed to achieve sustainable results and project training activities will need to be carefully targeted.**

Sustainability

2. There is little point in coming to the end of a project with a methodology that cannot be sustained with the budget resources available to the agency responsible for implementation. **More attention late in project life should be given to simplification of project approaches and to checking that they are not only within the technical capacity of the agency but also within likely budget resources. This process would be helped by a phasing out of Australian assistance** rather than sudden cessation of a high level of external inputs.

Participation of the Poorest

3. All of the project beneficiaries were poor at the start of the project and some benefited considerably from project activities. The project did not explicitly target the poorest villagers. Those villagers with little or no land and in locations without much water participated less and received fewer benefits than leaders and larger land owners in favourable locations. **There is a need to develop strategies that target poorer villagers and lead to greater participation and benefits for people other than leaders and larger land owners.**

3 EVALUATION OF THAI AUSTRALIA AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION PROJECT

Table 3.1: Summary of Performance and Impact, TAAEP Project

Objectives	Achievement of Objectives	Impact			
		Social	*Institutional*	*Income*	*Environment*
1. Extension methods & skills	moderate		moderate	low	
2. Communication other agencies	low		low		
3. Demonstration diversified prodn	moderate			low	low
4. Interest groups	moderate	low		low	
5. Stronger marketing system	low (high in one district)	low	low	low (moderate in Tron district)	

3.1 Project Background

The Thai-Australia Agricultural Extension Project (TAAEP) was implemented over three and a half years (1991 to 1995) in the provinces of Phitsanalok, Sukothai and Uttaradit. Australian staff were based in Phitsanalok and the Thai Project Director and Manager in Bangkok. The project drew upon experience in the earlier Pichit Area Development Project but was to focus on improving DOAE extension methodology, especially on increasing farmer participation in extension planning and implementation.

Total Australian expenditure was about A$ 5.2 million with RTG expenditure equivalent to A$ 0.4 million (Table 3.2). Australian technical assistance and management comprised 141 person months of long term and 37 months of short term consultant input plus 16 months of Thai consultant time (Table 3.3).

The TAAEP Project Completion Report (PCR) describes early emphasis on group development and village activities, including focus on women's programs, as a weakness because these activities were seen to detract from emphasis on institutional improvement. The post MTR project focused on extension methodology and processes and on marketing.

Table 3.2: Total TAAEP Expenditure (A$ '000 or per cent)

	GOA	RTG	Total	Per cent
Personnel	3,568.2	222.2	3,790.4	67.3
Procurement	531.0	38.5	569.5	10.1
Training	330.0	77.9	407.9	7.3
Other Costs	759.6	103.5	863.1	15.3
TOTAL	5,188.8	442.1	5,630.9	100.0
Per cent of Total	92.1	7.9	100.0	

Source: TAAEP PCR.

Table 3.3: GOA Cost Summary – by Output and Cost Type (A$ '000)

	Personnel	Procurement	Training	Other Project Costs	Total	Per cent
Planning Extension	901.3	244.1	70.0	193.2	1,408.6	26.5
Agency Liaison	197.5	-	0.0	44.9	242.4	4.6
Agricultural Development	469.5	29.9	116.1	96.4	711.9	13.4
Community Development	427.8	32.8	26.0	101.9	588.5	11.1
Marketing Activities	642.2	126.7	96.8	135.1	1,000.8	18.9
Project Management	929.9	97.5	21.1	188.1	1,236.6	23.3
Unexpected at March '95	3,568.2 57.0	531.0 0	330.0 60.0	759.6 0	5,188.8 117.0	97.8 2.2
Total	3,625.2	531.0	390.0	759.6	5,305.8	100.0

Source: TAAEP PCR.

3.2 Achievement of Objectives

Project Design

In contrast to the other projects in this cluster there were substantial changes in design over the life of this project. Initial discussion of the project began in 1987, a feasibility study was completed and agreement between Governments was reached in late 1990. The detailed project implementation design (PID) was submitted in early 1992. A mid-term review (MTR) presented a final set of proposed outputs in late 1993 and this evaluation focuses on achievements against MTR design objectives in the short period from the start of 1994 to completion in mid-1995.

Despite considerable investment in design, it appears that project implementation during 1992-93 was not in harmony with DOAE policy at the time. After the MTR the project

began to more closely meet the support needs of DOAE in revising extension systems to meet new objectives.

The MTR proposed a single logframe purpose:

> ... to improve the extension system ... by assisting villagers to better participate ... by assisting DOAE to implement and manage 'bottom-up' extension systems ... and by assisting interaction between farming communities and research, extension and agribusiness...

There were six outputs expected from the post-MTR project and these provide the structure for this evaluation:

- improved extension methods and skills of DOAE staff;
- improved communication and cooperation between relevant agencies and private organisations;
- more diversified agricultural production enterprises demonstrated;
- self sustaining specific interest groups (community development);
- strengthened marketing systems; and
- proper operating and monitoring systems (project management).

3.2.1 Achievement of Extension Method and Skills Objective

DOAE made a substantial change in extension methodology in late 1993 — away from the Training and Visit (T&V) system that had applied from the establishment of DOAE towards a more participatory, farmer centred system. The new approach gave more attention to farmers, prices and profits and changed the role of the Kaset Tambon (Extension Agent) from a manager of farmer clients to a coordinator of services.

The new system was modified at intervals to 1997. DOAE staff acknowledge substantial contributions from TAAEP (and other projects) to the development of the new approach. TAAEP contributed to the new system by analysis and discussion of methodology, by providing tools and equipment needed to apply a participatory approach and by training staff in the project area how to apply the new systems.

Most of these benefits were concentrated in the Planning sub-division of the Provincial office although they also affected the method of work of the district and sub-district extension officials. The current agricultural database (KPG) used by DOAE is said to be derived from the project management information system and data collection for the KPG, on an individual household basis, is a major part of present DOAE work. It was difficult to get a clear statement from DOAE officers as to exactly how they will use the KPG to improve the extension system.

The GIS map overlays covering soils, water, land use and other elements are also used in planning DOAE activities and were initiated by the project. These maps are now produced centrally but the roles of DOAE and Land Development Department (LDD) in preparation are not clear.

Institutional Aspects

Discussion with a small number of DOAE staff in project provinces indicated that project training provided some useful knowledge on technical aspects relating to extension methods. Examples mentioned were data collection, GIS and participatory planning. However, discussions also indicated that some staff did not have a clear idea of data collection and analysis. Others said that there should have been more training in data collection and use especially on the practical aspects.

Discussion with staff not involved with the project indicated that farmer needs analysis under the project may not have been good because some village activities were not well conceived and stopped at the end of the project. In this situation it was difficult to assess, from an institutional aspect, whether the project achieved its objectives under this output.

The PCR presents a comprehensive set of within project monitoring data but evidence of activities that continued after completion seems mainly to lie in the content of the present extension planning method and the supporting databases.

Overall, it seems that the project made moderate contributions to changes that were already underway in DOAE methods and that staff skills in the three project provinces benefited from project training. There is scope for further large improvements in extension methodology to make better use of data collected and to substantially increase the extent and quality of farm family participation in the process. In many cases farmer participation remains passive and limited to data provision. Strong, high level commitment to a farmer centred, market driven approach and avoidance of directed credit would encourage active farmer participation. Local adaptations of the "Check Approach" (Lacy, 1998) or other applications of adult learning theory would also be more likely to increase participation and effectiveness than large scale data collection from farmers.

Although there has been increased attention to the needs of smaller, rainfed farmers, much DOAE work remains focused on larger land owners who are eligible for Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) loans.

3.2.2 Achievement of Communication and Cooperation with Other Agencies Objective

There is some improvement in cooperation between Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives agencies but there is very little evidence to indicate that this flowed from

project initiatives. Livestock training, including DLD and DOAE staff and farmers was provided through TAAEP and may have contributed to this output. It was not possible to check the extent of communication with LDD about land use planning.

Staff of the provincial and district extension offices in project provinces were interviewed about coordination of their work with other agencies. Some considered that project training had improved their ability to coordinate better by providing a structure (activity teams) and greater technical knowledge which enabled them to communicate better with technical agencies. Other agencies were also invited to project seminars. The main purpose of this coordination appeared to be the planning of project activities.

It was the view of some staff that after the completion of the Australian project there was less intensive coordination with other agencies. Committees for planning development activities still met but this was also occurring before the project so it was difficult to say that a change had occurred. Discussions at district level in Sukhothai province indicated that some coordination between agencies was occurring but that staff did not associate this with an initiative of the Australian project. When prompted to consider the influence of the project they gave examples of isolated project activities (such as hay making) in which DOAE had worked with other agencies.

TAAEP appeared to make little progress towards this objective.

3.2.3 Achievement of Demonstration of Diversified Production Enterprises Objective

This is the project activity most commonly recalled when DOAE staff were questioned about TAAEP. A range of dry season crop production and processing options were demonstrated and staff received considerable technical training in this area. DOAE staff considered that they would have benefited from more training in technical elements of diversified farming system options.

DOAE staff interviewed said that they had received some useful training in technical aspects of their work. Examples given were vegetable growing, soil conservation, farming systems, grass strips and agricultural management. At the provincial level it was clear that most training was aimed at senior staff within the planning division which was responsible for the project.

It was claimed by these staff that the main focus of training was district level staff responsible for practical aspects of extension. It was felt that training was very useful for their work but that more was needed. One staff member estimated that he received no training for about 30 per cent of the project activities he undertook.

The only demonstrated option that appears to have had a lasting impact is the improved cattle raising project in Sukothai (see section 3.3 below).

In summary, TAAEP demonstrated a range of diversified production enterprises and increased the capacity of DOAE for this work. However, there is little evidence that these demonstrations led to changes in land use towards more sustainable or profitable cropping systems.

3.2.4 Achievement of Self-Sustaining Interest Groups Objective

The evaluation team visited villages where about 18 group activities had been initiated through the project. Roughly half of these groups were continuing in one form or another three years after project end. Most of the successful groups were created early in the project life (before MTR) and involved women's activities.

Some DOAE staff considered that useful training was received in community development, dress making and food processing but that more was needed in managing village production, processing and selling products, organising community groups and in training methodology. One village woman interviewed said that a study tour she undertook under the project gave her some new ideas but these could not be implemented because no revolving fund was available.

The project was moderately successful in achieving this objective, despite a reduction in priority for this work after the MTR.

3.2.5 Achievement of Strengthened Marketing System Objective

This activity was introduced after the MTR to more closely align project assistance and current DOAE priorities. The marketing activity inputs were confined to the short period of the last 18 months of project life.

The project designed an agricultural marketing and price database and information system. This system no longer exists and it is doubtful whether it ever made a practical contribution to strengthening project area markets.

TAAEP also contributed to the development of a central farmer market at Tron District in Uttaradit Province. This market operates as a registered farmer group and has grown strongly to 1200 members selling about 19 000 tonnes of paddy crop in 1998. This group started in 1992 and received project assistance in 1994 and 1995.

The main TAAEP inputs were for equipment, power supply, a training centre and training. Some of the handling and storage equipment supplied was inappropriate and is rarely used but the grain drying/aeration system is used for drying second crop rice each year. Group members valued TAAEP assistance for training in technical aspects of grain drying and quality control, in group management and for the infrastructure support.

The project clearly achieved the objective of strengthening farmer paddy marketing in Tron District, Uttaradit. Wider benefits would probably have required project inputs over a longer time period and in other districts.

Overall, the evaluation team was only able to detect modest progress towards TAAEP objectives. The project did contribute to some aspects of improved extension methodology and DOAE staff skills. It did demonstrate some diversified farming systems, established a few interest groups and contributed to improved paddy marketing in one district. An understanding of the reasons for this modest level of success should contribute to the lessons to be drawn from this evaluation. The most likely explanation is that the project operated for a short period of time and that for part of that time the Australian project team was working in a different direction to and in isolation (physical and conceptual) from senior DOAE policy makers and managers.

3.3 Project Impact

3.3.1 Family Income

No quantitative data are available to indicate project impact on the incomes of village families in project areas. Discussion with men and women in project and non-project villages generally suggested that life is more difficult today than it was five years ago, and it was not possible to separate project impact from general changes in the economy. Prices of inputs were increasing steadily and this trend accelerated in the past year — with fertiliser costs rising 30-40 per cent from 1997 to 1998. The prices of farm surplus outputs have either not risen or not risen as fast as input costs. These changes obscure any possible project impact.

The Tron Central Market clearly provides paddy price benefits to about 1200 members and larger benefits to the original/early members. But these benefits are not available elsewhere in the three provinces.

One group of village women in Tron thought that their general situation now was better than in the past because there is more alternative off-farm income available and more alternative crops (the latter because of the project). They also stated that cooperative effort in the village is now less than before because individual families tend to be forced by the present financial situation to look after their own welfare first. Others indicated their financial situation had deteriorated since last year because casual employment was no longer available.

Overall, it was not possible to detect a positive project impact on farm family incomes. The Sukothai cattle group visited is a clear exception. The 37 members reported strong (but unquantified) increases in income from cattle sales since the group began. The project technical support in dry season feeding, cross-breeding, organised access to BAAC credit, rice straw baling and sale and training in general animal husbandry had led to higher incomes. The big disease control benefits (attributed to the project by farmers and DOAE staff) are mainly derived from a national, non-project program. Farmers like the cattle project because it uses previously unused resources (grass) and there is a strong and consistent market for beef cattle.

3.3.2 Community Development and Participation Impact

Project activities have enabled some women to work together, gain status from increased participation, and strengthen collective activity. However, the concept of participation with informal women's groups was not entirely new to the villagers (as in the case of the Luang Pa Yang Weaving Group).

There was some reluctance to join non-agricultural activities as poor families need time for main income activities and work. The small extra money earned from the women's group helped families. However, it is only a leisure time or dry season activity for older people and not a principal source of household income. This situation may change as the economic opportunities outside the village decrease. Sound market research is needed if the income generating activities are to have greater impact.

There were 10-20 per cent of families who rented rice land (20-30 per cent if rental from parents is included). Non-members of agricultural activity groups are sometimes reluctant to become members because they are not able to make a long-term commitment. The impact of the project on these people was lower than that for larger landowners.

3.3.3 Environmental Impact

The project gave little attention to the environment, except that the diversified farming systems demonstrated did include soil conservation measures, fruit tree planting and a move away from mono-culture to systems including leguminous crops that may help to maintain soil fertility. The impact of this work on current farming practices seems to be minimal. After the MTR the project focused carefully on methodology, tools and marketing, without too much attention to any cross-cutting issues and the environmental impact is predictably low.

3.3.4 Institutional Impact

The size and structure of the provincial extension operation is important in assessing the impact of the project. For example, in Phitsanulok Province the project worked in two out of nine districts, two out of 93 sub-districts and six out of 910 villages. Any claim that there was a substantial institutional impact would require a measurable change in the way DOAE (and other agencies working to similar objectives) undertakes its work throughout the three project provinces and preferably in other provinces in Thailand.

Senior staff of DOAE advise that the Australian project initiated the data collection system now used as a basis for assessing farmer needs throughout Thailand (KPG). It is also claimed that data in this system is accessed by other agencies working in rural development.

Training under the project clearly had some impact on those staff interviewed though it is difficult to assess how far this benefit extends to other staff. Staff met during the

evaluation said that the training they received is useful to them in their present work and they were able to give concrete examples. There was, however, a consistent comment that training was insufficient and a number of areas were identified as needing additional input.

Other evidence of a weakness in institutional impact included:

- The Thai-Italian project undertook a needs survey but did not base it on the methodology introduced by the Australian project even though it followed TAAEP;
- The Extension Division in Phitsanulok claimed that most activities of the Australian project stopped when the project finished; and
- The planning system for extension activities in the project provinces is still at the data collection stage after three years.

In summary, it is difficult to reconcile various parts or sources of information on institutional impact. It is clear that the project did contribute to the development of tools that are used throughout the national extension system and that provincial staff training in participatory planning and technical aspects of crop diversification has improved performance in the three provinces. It is also clear that DOAE has more work to do before the current system is fully effective at lower levels. In particular, there is a need for more staff training in the analysis and use of collected data and to test alternative systems of engaging farm families more fully in the extension process.

3.4 Sustainability

The sustainability of social and community development outcomes was poor to moderate (post-MTR activities). The project appeared to be more concerned with the link between extension and credit access rather than the development of local capacity. In the pre-MTR project, the attempt to establish autonomous activities (especially women's groups) was problematic and away from DOAE responsibilities and priority, though some short-term gains were made. Inadequate market research was undertaken for women's group activities and most of these group activities were not sustainable.

The availability of DOAE budget is adequate to sustain use of extension methodology and the database developed with project assistance. Training was adequate at provincial level to sustain planning techniques but there seem to be skill gaps at district and sub-district levels that inhibit analysis and restrict effective farm family participation in the extension process.

So far as the grain marketing outputs are concerned, it is clear that the Tron Central Market is sustainable.

In contrast to the other cluster projects lack of budget is not a factor reducing sustainability. However, insufficient lower level training in participatory method and

data analysis appears to limit continued access to benefits from the improved extension methodology.

3.5 Project Lessons

TAAEP was less successful in achieving its objectives and making an impact on the lives of Thai villagers than AusAID or the RTG would have expected at the beginning. The main lessons to be drawn from this experience are:

1. **It is essential that initial project design and early implementation be closely aligned with the policies and priorities of the main implementing agency** (DOAE). This is particularly important in short projects. This is best achieved by securing close involvement of senior local agency staff in the design process at or shortly before implementation begins.

2. It was unrealistic to expect that the project could make a large contribution to major institutional change in a short time and when located in provinces well away from the key decision makers in Bangkok. In short, **projects that aim to support major institutional change require more than three years to be effective and they also demand very close working relationships between the Australian team and senior local policy makers.**

3. DOAE has some responsibility for poverty alleviation but traditionally it has had a production focus and tends to work with larger farmers seeking BAAC loans and in support of Government policy for agribusiness and cash crop development. Given these priorities it is not surprising that the benefits of projects implemented with an agency such as DOAE largely accrue to larger land owners and village leaders. This project sought to target some group activities to poorer families and women but with limited success. **There is a need to include more explicit design strategies to target the very poor and to work with appropriate agencies, if AusAID wishes to give poverty alleviation high priority in a particular project.**

4. Cross-cutting issues did not receive much attention. The **diversified farming systems demonstrated were environmentally friendly but rarely taken up by farmers.** When the project addressed the needs of women, results were frequently good. However, gender received very little attention in project training or data collection or planning. **More explicit efforts to understand the role of women in mainstream agriculture may have helped to improve the result of dry season crop diversification activities, increased development participation by men and women generally** and avoided the relegation of women to 'women's group' activities. Nevertheless, a few women have used project women's activities as a step into public life.

4 EVALUATION OF UBON RATCHATHANI LAND REFORM AREA PROJECT

Table 4.1: Summary of Performance and Impact, ULRAP Project

Objective	Achievement of Objectives	Impact			
		Social	*Institutional*	*Income*	*Environmental*
1. Local Organisation	moderate		low		
Sensitise Government Agencies					
Village Groups	very high	high		moderate	
Local Government	high		moderate		low
Raise Women's Participation	high	high		moderate	
2. Natural Resource Strategy					
Promote village Nat. Res. Projects	high	moderate		low	moderate
Raise ALRO NR Capacity	low		low		
Develop ALRO environ. management tools	low		low		
3. Infrastructure	**Construct**	**Maintain**			
Water, construct/ maintain.	high	low			low
Roads, construct/ maintain.	very high	low			high
4. Management					
Build ALRO systems for village development*	low* (high during project)		low		
Improve M&E procedures	low		low		

* The ALRO management systems applied during the project were effective and have been applied to other donor projects. They have not been applied to post-project routine ALRO work.

4.1 Project Background

The Ubon Ratchathani Land Reform Area Project (ULRAP) was conceived in 1988 and implementation began in mid-1991. It covered around 49 000 people living in 76 villages and an area of about 55 000 hectares of degraded forest. The main land use was, and is, bunded, wet season rice with limited upland cropping of cassava and other crops on sandy infertile soils.

The PID noted accelerating environmental degradation and that most attempts to redress this failed because they took no account of existing demands on the resource base. The PID suggested that problems of decreasing yields and land degradation were obstinate because there was:

- inadequate technical knowledge and a lack of suitable alternative technologies;
- inappropriate support from government agencies; and
- ineffective leadership and community organisation.

ULRAP was completed in early 1995 at a cost to the Australian Government of A$ 4.2 million (Table 4.2). The local NGO responsible for community development received AusAID support through Community Aid Abroad (CAA) to continue work until late 1998. RTG expenditure was considerable but remains unquantified.

Table 4.2: GOA Cost Summary – by Component and Category (A$)

	Technical Assistance	Procurement	Training	Operational	Total	Per cent
Local Organisations	888,754	174,021	96,130	235,000	1,393,905	33.2
Agricultural Development	824,316	135,179	80,750	147,612	1,187,857	28.3
Physical Infrastructure	540,076	74,163	15,695	117,839	747,773	17.8
Project Management	644,323	36,533	65,251	125,605	871,712	20.7
Total	**2,897,469**	**419,896**	**257,826**	**626,056**	**4,201,247**	**100**

Source: ULRAP PCR

4.2 Achievement of Objectives

Project Design

The Australian contribution to design was made by people with considerable experience in other rural development activities in Thailand. Moreover, the same group responsible for design implemented the project. There were few changes in design during the three year implementation period. The PCR notes a six month delay in Australian funding approval after design and suggests that this reduced the coincidence of Thai and Australian inputs. This seems to have had little long term effect on project performance.

An innovative feature of design was the use of an NGO-like group (Field Support Team, FST) implementing parts of the project in association with the main Government agency, ALRO. The same FST group was funded to continue support through an Australian

NGO after the bilateral project finished. The high quality of the FST work contributed to success in community development objectives and the follow-up lower level assistance consolidated project achievements. The good working relationship between FST and Government during the project was not completely maintained during the follow-up period.

The design placed strong emphasis on local group development and, in cost terms, similar emphasis on environmental and agricultural development, with lower investment in infrastructure and management.

The objectives of the project were to:

Develop Local Organisations by:

- orienting national, provincial and local government towards responsive methodology and processes;
- establishing village organisations with increased ability to plan and implement projects;
- strengthening Tambon Councils to prioritise and support village development; and
- increasing women's participation in community groups.

Develop natural resource management strategies in support of agricultural and environmental development by:

- promoting local NRM and sustainable agricultural activities that increase income and environmental quality;
- improving ALRO capacity to initiate and coordinate community agricultural and environmental projects; and
- developing the ALRO environmental management information system (EMIS) as a tool.

Construct and maintain Infrastructure so as to:

- increase access to domestic and agricultural water supplies; and
- improve area access by construction and upgrading the internal road system.

Manage the program and improve ALRO management and monitoring skills:

- develop within ALRO management systems for the identification, design and coordination of village development in ULRA; and
- clarify and refine monitoring and evaluation procedures that are appropriate to community based development in Land Reform Areas (LRA).

These objectives were to be achieved within a 3.5 year project life. In order to consolidate achievement of objectives, follow up NGO support was funded from the conclusion of the bilateral project in early 1995 until late 1998.

4.2.1 Achievement of Local Organisations Development Objectives

Performance in this component was outstanding. As shown in Table 4.1 achievement of the group formation and gender objectives received very high ratings and a high rating was also assigned to achievement of the local government strengthening objective (Tambon Council, later TAO). The most successful groups were women's and men's savings groups. Women's weaving, food processing and other income generation activity groups were also successfully established.

Training and opportunity provided for women, starting in women's group activities, has enabled some 14 women to be elected to mainstream local Government (TAO – 120 total members). While women's participation in public life remains low relative to men, it has increased markedly in recent years and local people attribute this to opportunity, training and encouragement provided through this project. Women generally reported that the project helped them to be more confident and capable in public life and the management of their own affairs.

Although this project seemed to achieve a wider spread of group membership towards the poorest quartile of the village when compared to other projects, it still appeared to focus on middle and upper income groups. It is claimed that about 90 per cent of the population participate in group activities but observation during the short field visit suggests that this may be an overstatement. There was little direct targeting of the poorest quartile of the population. The school lunch activities did access poorer students but no more so than others. This is surprising given the philosophy of the implementers.

Efforts to orient government towards participatory processes were moderately successful. There is clearly a range of staff at all levels who understand and value the methodology. The continued routine application of responsive approaches has been limited by shortages of suitable staff, budget, regulations and, perhaps, policy. The 'project approach' has been applied in two later foreign sponsored projects in other provinces but is not a part of routine ALRO work.

4.2.2 Achievement of Environmental and Agricultural Development Objectives

This objective sought to promote and facilitate locally initiated natural resource management and sustainable agricultural activities that increase incomes and improve environmental quality. It also aimed to improve ALRO capacity to initiate and coordinate agriculture and environmental activities and to develop an ALRO management information system (including Geographical Information System, GIS) as a tool for this work.

Early implementation studies indicated that over 90 percent of the land area was used for agriculture and that declining yields and low crop productivity were due to degradation of the resource base. The conclusion was that most of the environmental problems were 'caused directly by agriculture'. It was decided to combine agricultural and environmental activities and to use an agro ecological approach to develop sustainable, 'integrated farming systems'.

The project and follow-up activities have developed systems that are less dependent on external inputs and markets, emphasise self-sufficiency and gave priority to environmental benefits. The key elements of the systems usually included fish ponds, less reliance on chemical fertiliser and pesticides and a more diverse crop range, including fruit trees and vegetables and green manure crops. The project also demonstrated the value of liming to reduce the adverse yield effect of iron toxicity in some locations and demonstrated the value of improved rice seed and planting techniques. Some 1421 extension trials were conducted in farmers fields and schools. The project achieved the objective of developing and demonstrating more environmentally sensitive farming systems but the acceptability of these systems to the broad farming community remains to be shown. The impact of these systems is discussed below.

There was less evidence available to the team that the objective of increasing ALRO capability in agricultural, environmental and GIS planning and management had been achieved. Certainly, staff directly associated with the project are more aware of issues and have new technical skills. It may also be that ALRO Bangkok has increased GIS skills. However, at Ubon provincial level there are only three staff remaining with direct project experience and they do not apply that experience in other land reform areas within the province. Access to central services, such as GIS, seems to be mainly limited to donor projects and is rarely used in routine ALRO land distribution activities (where GIS clearly has great potential).

Overall, achievement of this objective is assessed as moderate. It is probably high for environmental quality, moderate for farm income generation (including home consumption) and low for ALRO agricultural and environmental capability.

4.2.3 Achievement of Physical Infrastructure Objectives

The construction objectives for water and roads were achieved as planned. Road levels and culverts were designed to minimise adverse effects of roads on adjacent rice fields. Weir construction did not include associated activities aiming to improve water use or distribution of benefits.

The maintenance objectives were not achieved for water or roads because RTG budget to fund maintenance is very limited and rationed across all land reform areas in Thailand. Most project roads have received one maintenance pass since construction in 1993-94. Local capacity to maintain roads and water structures is yet to develop beyond very minor works.

4.2.4 Achievement of Program Management Objectives

Project management by ALRO and the Australian contractor was excellent during the life of the project. However, there was only limited progress towards the objectives that aimed to institutionalise the 'project approach' in ALRO routine operations. A small number of ALRO staff at provincial and central levels understand the methods employed in ULRAP and these have been applied in two other donor-assisted ALRO projects.

After the project routine ALRO land distribution work continued in other LRA in Ubon without access to GIS support from Bangkok and without community development or agricultural elements, either from ALRO staff or NGO.

Overall, ULRAP was outstandingly successful in achieving the local organisation development objectives, including the specific gender objective, and moderately successful in achievement of the agricultural/environmental objectives. It was less successful in the objective of changing ALRO procedures for the reasons discussed in section 4.4 below.

4.3 Project Impact

4.3.1 Family Income

Four sets of activities might be expected to have a direct impact on family incomes (including both cash income and more/better quality food and other goods for home consumption):

- savings groups, by increasing access to credit;
- diversified farming systems;
- income generation groups, mainly women's food processing/handicrafts; and
- infrastructure improvement.

Savings Groups for men and women continue in about 58 out of 76 villages in the project area. The number of participating households has fallen from about 3800 at the end of the project to 2800 households in late 1997 out of a total of 7700 households in villages with groups (CAA, 1997). However, total funds per member have increased from about B770 in 1995 to B1580 in late 1997, with members own funds reaching about B2.5 million in total (CAA 1997).

Income effects are only one aspect of the savings group success. It seems that about 25 per cent of all project area households (~10 000hh total) have access to credit through the savings groups, that this access is appreciated and reduces household borrowing costs but that the direct impact of group saving/lending on incomes is modest. The project and follow-up activities have created groups with the motivation and skills needed to make a greater contribution to local credit. However, such credit remains rationed and

is seldom adequate to meet reasonable production needs, even in a low input system. Financial impact would be greater if funds with competent, honest management had access to some external funds, on commercial terms and with maintenance of emphasis on the value of local saving (for example, increase loan limit from three times saving to five times saving, so preserving an incentive to save).

Diversified Farming Systems had been adopted by about 440 households in late 1997 compared to about 130 households at project end and a total population of about 10000 households (CAA 1997). Other families have accepted individual elements of the diversified farming approach. Again, the benefits are probably larger in the areas of participation, personal development and environmental awareness than in increased cash or home consumed produce. No data was obtained to support the contention that higher incomes are being achieved by a range of diversified farmers and the impression exists that the philosophy is more important than money.

Farm families reported that the project was responsible for more fish ponds, fruit trees and crop diversification but the low adoption rate suggests that for most families the system promoted includes some unacceptable constraints or risks. It may be that villagers in general and poorer, younger families in particular, lack access to capital for ponds and put a higher priority on short term cash income than future, uncertain (in their eyes) farm or environmental benefits. Experience in this project is important because a vigorous national debate is under way concerning the same philosophical issues and the balance or nature of the relationship between farm income, diversified systems and the environment. The narrow uptake seems to support the conclusion that in this project the diversified farming approach has had a minor impact, so far, on farm incomes (sold and consumed at home).

Women's income generation groups have been an important avenue along which women have passed towards participation in local, mainstream development. However, again, their contribution to an aggregate increase in project area income is likely to be small. Food processing and semi-industrial production of organic shampoo and similar items are said to be the most profitable but the uptake and output are small. One team estimate of return to women's weaving time suggests that about Baht 20 per day can be earned weaving. This may be compared to farm labour at Baht 90 per day and urban construction work at B130 per day. It is concluded that the main impact of these project activities is outside the family income area.

Assessment of **Roads and Water Infrastructure** impact was limited to conversation with people in several villages and the observation that the roads, in particular, receive moderate use and are still passable at the end of the rainy season. The weirs are used for dry season livestock water, early start of rice nurseries, very small areas of dry season vegetables and pump supplementary irrigation of main season rice. The crop financial impact of project water infrastructure is likely to be small and confined mainly to landowners near the weirs. Livestock financial benefits are spread more widely within

villages and may be slightly larger where other dry season water for stock was unavailable pre-project.

The project area was moderately served by roads before the project. The project improved some existing roads and added to the network. Villagers were invited to compare transport costs, market access and product prices and Government services pre- and post-project but could not separate changes attributable to better project roads from other national economic changes e.g. fuel price changes. Experience elsewhere suggests that where a project road markedly improved access to the main service town then substantial financial benefits would accrue to villagers. This may be the case in about 25 per cent of the project area but we are unable to quantify or verify that impact.

In short, the project has set the scene for strong local development but this has yet to be translated into substantial, widespread increases in family income (sold or home consumed). There are trends in the right direction but for most families annual income continues to fluctuate in line with rice yield and price.

4.3.2 Community Development and Participation Impact

It was not possible to separate the bilateral project impact from the follow-up activities in this area or from national trends. However, it is clear that there has been a very substantial post-project increase in village leadership skills, both women and men, that there is much greater local participation in decision making and that some democratisation or widening of leadership groups and membership processes has occurred. This evaluation confirms the findings of the NGO evaluation (CAA 1997) in this regard.

Strong impact evidence can be seen in: the composition and work of local Government (TAO); increased mobilisation of local resources, including Savings Groups; increased village cohesion; and the continuation of many group activities (about 80 per cent of villagers are members of one group or another). Perhaps the strongest indicator of impact is the national prominence of the 'Hat Lam Dom Yai' network. This network was created in the follow-up activity and consists mainly of people who were active in project group and leadership programs. The network seems likely to be one of the first groups in Thailand to meet Social Investment Fund criteria and so access external funds for locally planned and executed development. When this occurs there will be an opportunity to use the leadership skills and community capacity, derived from project/follow-up activities. This should further increase access to services and continue to build income in new environmentally sustainable farm and non-farm activities.

This very substantial impact on communities and participation in public life was achieved in a short time through the application of sound methodology by caring, skilled community workers and local men and women. The only flaw in this impressive story is that the impact on the lives of the very poor (say bottom 20 per cent, landless or small

area farmers) has been limited to date. The school lunch activity has improved the quality of nutrition for children in this group but otherwise they remain vulnerable.

4.3.3 Environmental Impact

The Diversified (Alternative) Farming Systems developed during the project and follow-up activities have been applied by about 5 per cent of project area households (CAA 1997). It follows that the direct and complete impact on the environment is limited to a small part of the project area. However, most leaders and villagers interviewed reported that they had planted more fruit trees and were more aware of the need to care for the environment than they had been in pre-project years. The overall environmental impact is probably greater than that indicated by the slow uptake of diversified farming.

Nevertheless, farmers reported that land use decisions are dominated by short term financial aspects and they are usually unwilling to forgo immediate income for longer term benefits. The aggregate land use pattern remains similar to that prevailing before the project although it may be applied in a more environmentally sensitive fashion. In particular pesticide and fertiliser use is restricted or carefully targeted. At best the impact to this date is moderate with some expectation of increased impact in the future.

4.3.4 Institutional Impact

The impact on local institutions has been large — village groups, TAO, Hat Yam Dom Yai — now operate actively and effectively. They were either moribund or non-existent before the project.

The impact on ALRO at provincial and national levels has been much smaller. A small number of staff at both levels have an understanding of and the skills necessary to replicate the project approach elsewhere. However there remains considerable resistance to the use of NGOs by some ALRO staff and both internal and external factors limit replication to donor-funded projects. Shortages of the right kind of staff (restricted by Civil Service Commission), lack of budget, regulations preventing engagement of NGOs and lack of necessary data were quoted as constraints.

Reform at high levels, to redefine the roles and resources of agencies such as ALRO, ARD, CDD and others, is needed before a project like this can be expected to impact on routine operations outside donor projects.

4.3.5 Impact Overview

In short, the project and its follow-up activity had a very high impact on local development capacity and in bringing women into the mainstream of local public life. It had moderate impacts on local infrastructure and the introduction of better environmental and agricultural systems and a low impact on the provincial and national institutional capacity to replicate the project successes elsewhere.

4.4 Sustainability

One of the advantages of success in developing local capacity is that sustainability is enhanced by the increased ability to mobilise local resources and improved access to government services. The emergence of well-funded TAO and the SIF seem likely to provide resources that the local people and networks can access. Overall sustainability at this level appears secure.

It is likely that most of the project's group activities will also be sustainable because of the methodology and orientation of the FST working with both local government officials and villagers (mainly natural leaders). The short time bilateral project frame was inadequate for ensuring that groups were sustainable, and the three-year NGO add-on was essential in this regard. Activities are deemed to have been sustainable where they have been shown to have empowered and mobilised local communities to the point where external support is no longer needed. At least 50 per cent of activities are at this level.

ALRO project operations were not sustainable because budget constraints and regulations prevented application of important development elements, except where another donor intervened to overcome these constraints.

4.5 Project Lessons

There are several strong lessons from the ULRAP experience:

1. **It is clear that a design that emphasises genuine participation, and is implemented by skilful and caring people, can achieve great increases in village development capacity in the short time of five or six years.** The use of an NGO to complement ALRO community development capacity and the AusAID decision to provide follow up funding at the end of the bilateral project have produced able local leaders with a strong network, active local government and the ability to access additional investment funding in the future.
2. **Serious and effective attention to gender in project design and implementation yielded faster progress in community development generally and more balanced local government decisions** than those likely to have flowed from a male-centred approach. The gender strategy started with women's income generation groups and savings groups and the leaders of these groups moved in a short time to elected positions on Tambon Administrative Organisations and the Area Network.

3. Surprisingly for such a socially sensitive project, it remained difficult for the very poor to participate actively and benefit directly from project activities. ULRAP did not explicitly target the very poor. The schools program is inclusive but savings groups and other activities (while not exclusive) mainly attract middle and upper villagers. **It is necessary to devise strategies that enable poorer people to participate in and benefit directly from a project and to devote part of project resources to support those strategies.**

4. **Wider replication of this very successful project requires changes in Government policies, civil service structure, regulations and budget allocation priorities.** Additional staff training in community development processes and the ability to engage NGO-like staff are also needed. The question - Why is this good approach not applied much elsewhere in your work? — deserves careful consideration and an answer. 'The best aid projects support initiatives that change the way the public sector does business' (World Bank, 1998b). ULRAP fostered an active civil society and demonstrated improved service delivery to poor areas but it has not yet changed the way ALRO does business.

5. **A large increase in community development capacity generally, in leadership skills and the status and roles of women and access to Government services, does not automatically and promptly lead to substantial increase in family income (sales plus home consumption).** In the long run increased community capacity is expected to lead to better lives and higher income but this often requires wider adoption of more productive and environmentally sound farming systems, access to better markets or establishment of profitable non-farm enterprises. Most of these changes need access to larger amounts of investment capital than has been available in the project area to date.

5 GENDER AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 5.1: Summary of Gender Achievements and Impact by Project

Objectives	Achievement of AusAID's WID/GAD Objectives		Impacts
	Women have a say in development decision-making	*Increased women's participation in implementation*	*Enhanced women's role and status in public*
HASD II			
Agricultural Development	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Social Development	Moderate	Moderate	Relatively low
Institutional Development	Moderate	Moderate	Relatively low
TAAEP			
Improved extension methods and skills of DOAE staff	Moderate	Low	Low
Improved coordination with other agencies	Low	Relatively low	Low
Demonstration of diversified production systems	Low	Relatively low	Low
Development of self-sustaining groups	Moderate	Moderate	Relatively low
Strengthened marketing systems	Low	Low	Low
ULRAP			
Development of local organizations	High	High	Moderate
Environmental and Agricultural Development	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Physical infrastructure	-	-	-
Program management	-	-	-

5.1 Evaluation Framework

The evaluation of the projects' achievements and impacts on women and rural development was based on policies in place at the time of project implementation - AIDAB Women In Development Policy Integration Review of 1988 and the Ministerial Policy Statement of 1992.

The gender analysis framework of the 1988 review was intended to:

- assist in improving the effectiveness of aid programs by taking account of women's as well as men's needs and preferences in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of aid projects;
- strengthen the impact of development assistance by securing the participation of all available resources (women and men) in its planning and implementation;
- increase the productivity of women's activities; and
- promote a balanced share in the benefits derived from development assistance for men, women, and children.

The 1992 Ministerial statement relating to the new policy on women's role in development aimed to:

- ensure women have a say in decision-making about overall aid objectives, sectoral emphases and types of activities, so that the aid program is increasingly relevant to women's needs and preferences;
- increase women's direct participation in all aid activities so that Australia's ODA is more developmentally effective; and
- enhance women's status through initiatives which address the causes of systematic disadvantage and women's specific economic and social needs.

5.2 Gender Objectives: Achievement, Impact, Sustainability by Project

Only one of the three projects, ULRAP, gave serious attention and resources to gender issues throughout project life. It follows that gender monitoring data and analysis are absent or minimal in project reporting for HASD II and TAAEP and are substantial for ULRAP.

5.2.1 The HASD II Project

Achievement of Objectives

Neither the original nor subsequent project designs contained explicit gender objectives. During the first half of the project, implementation emphasis was placed on agricultural development and very little attention was given to the integration of women into project activities. Men were the main target group.

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) found that the role of women in agriculture had not been sufficiently addressed and that percentages of women participants in agricultural training were very low. It was also reported that women's share of project benefits was low. The MTR suggested that the Social Development Component of the project should move from a focus on agriculture to a greater concern with social issues and the involvement

of women. After the MTR, the project focused more on gender aspects, both at institutional and field levels, by recruiting new female staff to work specifically with the village women. Several women's groups were established and women's income generation activities promoted. Women were encouraged to express their needs and concerns through participation in separate village problem census exercises. However, gender analysis exercises were carried out only in some villages and the project staff did not receive specific training on WID or GAD strategies. There was little disaggregation of monitoring data by gender.

The project's success in involving women in **agricultural development** both in the planning and operational processes was judged to be **moderate,** given that men were the traditional agricultural decision makers in some tribes (e.g. Hmong). This judgement is based on discussion with villagers as training data by gender was not available.

For the **social development** component, the project achieved a relatively **higher** level of success in implicit WID objectives. Evidence includes the increased numbers of women's groups and activities, numbers of women having access to mother and child care health services and the increased numbers of girls attending primary and NFE schools towards the end of the project. Women's ability in speaking Thai language also increased, clearly as the result of more frequent interaction with project staff working in the area and more access to study tours and training. The PCR reports that by project end about 70 per cent of villages held problem census meetings, attended by 53 per cent of men and 29 per cent of women. Some 35 per cent of women were able to speak Thai compared to 60 per cent of village men. Almost all of the 357 village revolving funds are managed by men but a large proportion of the 480 community groups are operated for and by women. Around 21 per cent of households had members in women's groups (mainly income generation groups).

For the **institutional development** component, the project's success in promoting the role of women in the planning and implementation process was **high.** More female staff were hired to work on WID activities at field level. Project female staff were given equal opportunities to participate in the staff problem census exercise, to express their ideas and concerns about project work and to develop plans for further operation. However, the majority of the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) members were men who were recruited prior to project implementation. This may be due to the fact that most of HTWD work is in remote and difficult areas and men seemed to be more favoured than women in such situations. Yet, the project did try to increase numbers of women staff in its provincial office both at decision making and supporting levels. There was no evidence of women's membership of village development committees during the project period. By the time of evaluation, a few project women group leaders had become community leaders in some villages.

Impacts

The project did have some impact in mobilising women's participation in development. At project completion, women's participation rates were about half those of men (problem census meetings attended by 53 per cent of men and 29 per cent of women). Traditional roles for women in community affairs vary from one ethnic group to another but most village women interviewed said that their public activity had increased with project encouragement and training. Nevertheless they acknowledged that most leadership remains with village men, except for some specific income generation activities. Where women had participation in public activities, their role was more as labour or supporters of the activities rather than as leaders or decision makers. There were a few cases where project women's group leaders had become village committee members or village leaders.

Although benefits in terms of income from women's activities were relatively low compared to farm income, the women felt that useful supplements were being earned. These supplements could be earned without having to leave the village for outside hired labour work. Through working as a group, the women also recognised that they learned to organise themselves more systematically and gradually improved management skills. However, it was obvious the women's public status was little enhanced and that the benefits of their economic activities were limited to small family contributions.

At the institutional level the project had an impact in increasing awareness of project staff on WID and GAD issues, but it did not help the project staff to systematically implement WID/GAD activities at the intensity required to yield substantial impacts at the community level. However, the fact that WID/GAD issues only received priority after the MTR, meant that the project had a quite limited time to deal specifically with this aspect (only during the last year of project implementation). Project experience assisted a few women to gain promotion to senior provincial and national positions within PWD.

Sustainability

Although the project WID activities did have some impact on increasing women's role and status both during and after the project period, it appeared that these activities were not generally sustainable. Some women's group activities continued (mainly handicrafts) but with limited progress or enhancement. The input that HTWD is making to support these women's activities is also limited, inhibiting its ability to expand the project's WID initiatives into other HTWD areas.

Project Lessons Learned

1. The project emphasised poverty alleviation through heavy agricultural inputs and tended to exclude women's role in its decision making and planning process, despite the fact that women are the major labour force in farm work.

This happened partly because WID and gender policies were not made explicit in the project design or objectives . A lack of WID and GAD awareness and skills among project staff also contributed to the ignorance of women's roles in agricultural decision making. **A good project design, therefore, should have explicit gender and development elements, both in its objective and in implementation strategies. In addition to recruiting more female staff to work directly with women's groups, the project should have provided training in WID and GAD methodologies to its staff, so that all project activities incorporated gender aspects in their design and implementation. This would have increased project development impacts on both women's and men's lives.**

2. The achievement of WID and GAD goals requires changes in attitudes of both men and women involved in the project at all levels. This is unlikely to be effectively achieved within the limited time of one or two years, without a systematic approach in planning and implementation of the activities to influence changes. **More effective incorporation of women in the development process requires a longer implementation period than the two years available after the HASD MTR. This is particularly so for ethnic groups that do not traditionally assign leadership roles to women. Of course, if WID policies and strategies had been taken seriously at the start of HASD II and before the MTR, then this difficulty would not have arisen.**

5.2.2 The TAAEP Project

Achievement of Objectives

The project did not have a specific WID objective but the design did include women's group development as part of the extension system. During the first half of the project there was some focus on the formation and development of women's groups. In the second half of the project, however, the focus was shifted towards the development of DOAE's extension and data system. The levels of project achievement in WID activities varied from output to output.

Improved Extension Methods and Skills of DOAE Staff

Project success in involving women farmers in planning family farming activities in the new extension method was **moderate** during the project and declined after completion. The extension system focused on heads of households (mainly men) in the data collection process to develop farmers' farm plans. At the institutional level, a number of female staff got some training in the skills needed for the implementation of the new extension system. At the lower level, however, there were few women staff involved in implementation of the system.

Demonstration of Diversified Agricultural Production Enterprises

The project was less successful in achieving WID objectives for this output. A few women's groups were established to demonstrate alternative cropping practice such as fruit or vegetable production. A small number of these later became successful diversified agricultural groups which benefited larger numbers of members. In more cases, however, decision making and the leading role in adopting new agricultural activities still remained with men, while women participated in the implementation of the adopted activity.

Development of Self-Sustaining Specific Interest Groups within Rural Communities

The project achieved a **moderate** level of success in promoting women's participation in decision making and implementation of women's targeted development activities during the project life. Some of these groups in food processing or handicrafts maintained activities after the project but with little further expansion or progress.

Strengthened market systems

The project had rather **low** success in increasing women's participation in marketing activities. New market channels introduced for women's income generation activities during the project life could not be sustained by the women themselves after the project ended. Weaving groups could not sell their goods at acceptable prices. The Central Rice Market at Tron has some women heads of household as members and one woman board member. However it is male dominated, with the attitude that women can contribute because 'they are good hostesses and good at book keeping'.

Overall the project delivered about 19 000 person days of training of which 30 per cent was for women.

Impact

In general, the project did have a social impact in mobilising women to participate in development activities, which could slightly improve their economic status. As a result of such participation, the women also felt more confident in their abilities to plan and manage their development activities and were more aware of the benefits of collective efforts. Such impacts were not widespread but were limited to women who were closely involved in group activities.

The second half of the project focused on institutional impact. While DOAE women staff participated actively in project training, there is little evidence that the extension systems developed recognise the specific roles and needs of women in mainstream farming activities. For example, data collection, for planning and analysis, is focused on head of household interviews with limited involvement of women. Home economics specialists deliver support to women's activities but there is little evidence that the project contributed to an increase in the status of women or facilitated their contribution to improved farming systems.

Sustainability

Most of the women's groups established by the project could be sustained with the support of DOAE home-economists who worked mainly with women's groups. In some cases, DOAE also looked for cooperation with other agencies in the district to provide income-generation training to women's groups and so enhance the women's IGA skills and sustain their groups. Many of these groups, however, were unlikely to be able to continue effectively on their own, especially in the marketing of their products. They still rely largely on line agencies as their market links.

Project Lessons learned

1. **Women's activities are more likely to be sustainable after the project if they are well-integrated into the existing structure of the implementing agency,** in this case, home economics. The effectiveness of such activities, however, depends very much on the quality of training the women received and the activities they carry out.
2. **Traditional women's activities tend to have only limited impact on change of status.**

5.2.3 The ULRAP Project

Achievement of objectives

This project had a clear and explicit WID objective under the Development of Local Organizations component which was: *to increase women's participation in local organizations and community groups* (by providing them with the skills necessary to identify, develop, and implement solutions to their most important problems). The project had a systematic WID approach that provided training on WID and Gender to its staff at all levels, as well as to leaders and members of women's groups. Gender analysis exercises were conducted at village level at an early stage of women's group formation. Women's groups were taken on several study tours to expose them to information and give new experience on alternative income generation and development activities.

The project (and follow up activity) success in achieving the WID objective was considered to be **high.** Women's groups were established in almost every project village, mostly as saving groups which provided access to credits for agricultural inputs and the education of their children. The number of women in savings groups was negligible at project start and increased to 1279 in women's savings groups and 644 in village groups in 1995. Follow up activity increased membership further to 1540 in women's savings groups and 1359 in village groups by late 1997 (CAA, 1997).

Other activities focused largely on traditional women's activities such as weaving, dyeing, dress making, food processing or natural shampoo and cosmetic production. By 1997

there were 65 groups functioning with 602 leaders and 2047 members (CAA, 1997). Most of these women's activities were separated from men-controlled activities (eg. village saving groups). This separation enabled women to have a full role in the planning and implementation of their own activities. Women's status at the public level was improved as a result of their lively economic activities and their proven management skills. Women on village committees increased from 2 in 1995 to 18 in 1997 (CAA, 1997).

Impacts

The project had substantial impacts on improving women's decision making roles, their participation in development activities, as well as their leading role and status in the community. Women's saving groups were perceived by the women and their families as a potential credit source for their farm activities, which could reduce dependency on loans from middlemen or landlords who charged high interest rates. Their food security and quality of food were also improved as a result of some of their activities such as mushroom cultivation, brown rice pounding and fish ponds. They also claimed that funds from these activities helped to enhance educational opportunities for their children. However, the financial impact of these improvements has not been quantified.

At the community level, the status of women has been significantly enhanced. There was an increasing number of the project women's group leaders represented in village development committees, village saving groups, and, most importantly in the Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO), which is the formal people's organisation at sub-district level. Some 14 project area women are now TAO elected members. The involvement of women representatives in the TAO helped to refocus development funds from roads and other infrastructure development, to more social development programs which could benefit lives of the men, women, and children in the communities in a more balanced way. Women are also active drivers in the Hat Lam Dom Yai NGO network. These impacts flow from project initiatives and they have been enhanced by follow up NGO support.

Sustainability

Women's groups formed under the project have been sustained and expanded with substantial progress in their activities and abilities to manage and extend the groups. A network of project groups, including women's groups, has been established to provide mutual support and to lobby government. The network (Hat Lam Dom Yai) also had an impact on environmental protection in the area through a campaign against dam construction and has received recognition at the national level. With appropriate technical and financial support from external sources, such as NGOs and the Social Development Fund, the network will play an important role in improving the economic status of both men and women living in the area. This network has also provided a channel where women can participate and expand their roles in the communities.

Project Lesson

1. A project design that is inclusive and gives explicit recognition to the development needs and contributions of women can yield a rapid increase in local development capacity, provided implementation is effective.

5.3 Overall Gender Lessons

1. **Serious and effective attention to gender in project design and implementation**, as in ULRAP, will lead to faster growth of local development capacity and to more balanced village decision making.
2. **Having separate women's activities is a good strategy at the beginning** to build up women's self-confidence and self-esteem without being dominated by men. However, **at a later stage, women should be incorporated into the mainstream of development at the community/public level to enhance their public role and status as well as to ensure equity.**
3. **Activities that aim to improve women's participation in development should not focus only or mainly on traditional women's skills and activities,** which tend to have little impact on their economic status and reinforce the causes of systematic disadvantages of women in the society. **They should also try to address the causes of gender inequality and enhance women's opportunity to participate** in development activities as equal partners to men.

6 ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT

Table 6.1: Summary of Environment Achievements and Impact

Project	HASD II	TAAEP	ULRAP
Design Priority for Environment Strategies Adopted:	High • small irrigation to reduce pressure on rainfed system • improved rainfed cropping systems • village land use planning and protection areas	Low • apply soil conservation and diverse crop range in system demonstrations	High • develop diverse, integrated farming system and demonstrate, train, support with materials • develop ALRO capacity
Omissions	• IPM/chemical use	• serious intent and training	• perhaps realistic financial analysis and lower participatory level than other ULRAP activities
Achievements	• small irrigation = high • rainfed crop systems = low • land use planning = high	• demonstration of diversified systems = moderate	• demonstration of integrated system = high • adoption of integrated system = low • ALRO capacity = low
Impact	• Moderate	• Low	• Moderate
Overall Rating	• Moderate	• Low	• Moderate

6.1 Achievement of Objectives

Conservation of the environment was a high priority objective in two of the three projects. In **HASD II** it may be that the prime motivation of the World Bank and RTG in seeking Australian Phase I technical assistance was to protect two major irrigation dams (supplying lowland Thai rice farms) from siltation. In this case the social, political, drug and strategic aspects of hill tribe development were second level considerations.

The nature of the technical assistance supplied supports this thesis. The HASD II objective was 'to introduce permanent farming systems to minimise damage to the environment and increase farm production for food and/or sale'.

The **ULRAP** design explicitly recognised that land degradation and environmentally unsustainable farming systems were at the root of poverty in the project area. The relevant objective expressed was to: develop natural resource management (NRM) strategies in support of agricultural and environmental development by:

- promoting local NRM and sustainable agricultural activities that increase income and environmental quality;
- improving ALRO capacity to initiate and coordinate community agricultural and environmental projects; and
- developing the ALRO environmental management information system (EMIS) as a tool.

The **TAAEP** PID (p. 71) acknowledged the existence of 'AIDAB Activity Guideline No. 1' but did not consider it necessary to include an environmental management plan. The PID did list environmentally favourable cropping practices that were to be considered in developing sustainable farming systems and said that it would examine the potential for 'so-called organic farming'. The MTR, which provides the base for this evaluation, gave brief attention to the environment acknowledging the poor and erodible condition of soils and reported that 'DOAE is yet to decide whether ... soil conservation and fertiliser techniques ... will become part of the Kaset Tambon's (extension agent) knowledge base ...through project training…' It would seem that the ideology underpinning ULRAP and TAAEP lies towards opposite ends of the environmental spectrum.

There was little AusAID **monitoring of TAAEP performance on crosscutting issues** during the project life. Progress reporting generally ignored gender and the environment and the MTR also had other priorities.

Table 6.1 presents a summary of achievements and likely impact based on field observations by the evaluation team. HASD II and ULRAP achieved much of what they set out to do, except in the very difficult area of developing better rainfed cropping systems acceptable to farm families. HASD II reduced pressure on rainfed areas by developing small scale irrigation and received independent recognition for success in watershed management via village land use planning committees. ULRAP successfully developed an alternative farming system that places less reliance on external fertiliser and pesticide inputs. It includes a range of crops other than rice, fruit trees, vegetables and fish production. ULRAP has raised concern for the environment to a higher level in a wider segment of the village population, as shown by the successful opposition to local dam construction. TAAEP did demonstrate more environmentally friendly cropping systems during the project but this activity received low priority (compared to methodology and marketing) after the MTR and is not at the centre of current DOAE activities.

6.2 Impact and Sustainability

HASD and ULRAP gave serious attention to environmental sustainability as an objective and were moderately successful in achieving some of the specific sub-objectives. In Highland villages where water development and local land use planning have been applied there is a marked reduction in continuous, destructive cropping of steeply sloping rainfed land and good observance of local protection regulations. A high positive impact on environmental sustainability has occurred in these small areas. The only negative here is the increased, untargeted use of pesticides on the vegetable crops. Local people and HTWD staff are aware of this problem but report that private sector contractors have more influence on pest and disease control than HTWD. Further action along Integrated Pest Management (IPM) lines is required.

In contrast, much larger areas of rainfed rice continue to be cropped in the traditional destructive fashion, where highland villages do not have access to water resources that permit higher value production from small areas. In these areas HASD has raised awareness of the need to change but the solutions have yet to be convincingly demonstrated. For this reason the overall environmental impact is assessed as moderate.

Similarly in ULRAP, project staff and the FST team in follow-up years have enthusiastically promoted alternative farming systems with substantial impact on environmental sustainability in those small areas where the system has been applied –perhaps five per cent of the total project area. There has also been a wider positive impact on farmer attitudes to conservation. But the practical, hard assessment is that most of the land use in the project area is similar to that which prevailed pre-project. The environmental impact is thus moderate.

What is missing in both HASD and ULRAP (and in vast areas of SE Asia) and prevents wider impact is the local application of an improved rainfed cropping system that:

- delivers higher, stable rice yields without high external inputs, so reducing the area that has to be planted to rainfed rice;
- contains a diverse range of crops that favour weed and pest control, soil improvement and give some opportunity for cash sales to meet family needs; and
- requires little investment either in cash or income forgone.

Very large resources have been invested by RTG and donors, such as OECF in NE Thailand, in the search for such systems that are acceptable to farm families. ACIAR and several IRCs continue to fund research programs that aim to improve rainfed farming systems. Success has been limited - basically most farmers do not believe that the alternative systems increase food security and cash surplus sales. And so they continue to make trial and error modifications around the edges of traditional systems and the improvement in environmental sustainability remains moderate. Greater two way flow of information between the researchers and implementation projects should lead to greater progress.

Sustainability

Those parts of the ULRAP and HASD II project areas that have accepted and currently use new project-derived farming systems are likely to continue to see a flow of benefits as they have the necessary technology, resources and, where needed, market linkages to favour sustainability. The exception is the pesticide issue in HASD II.

HASD II has created the institutional capacity to continue and to expand project achievements but lacks resources for further investment, farmer training or community land use planning support. ALRO lacks the necessary skills in sufficient quantity, as well as budget. The Ubon NGO/FST has the necessary skills to mobilise local resources to expand sustainable systems. However, they also may need to work more closely with villagers to understand why the current system is not more widely accepted and to modify the approach in response. It is often hard to find the balance between concepts of purity, self-sufficiency and high conservation priority on one hand, and farm family concern about food security and cash needs for education or consumer goods.

6.3 Lessons

Experience with HASD and ULRAP indicates that it is possible for projects to make progress towards improved environmental sustainability, even in poor and difficult environments.

1. **Village participatory land use planning can be used to protect water and forest resources where the immediate needs of people are met,** for example by development of small scale irrigation, **and where people can see the longer term benefits to their village** from better conservation of soil, water or forest resources. Conversely, it is difficult to make progress where farm families are desperately poor, where there is no alternative employment or income and where longer term benefits are discounted heavily compared to the urgency of the next traditional crop. Community participation in the development of environmental management plans is imperative.
2. **Strategies that rely on concentration of farming activity in smaller, higher value activity**, such as small scale irrigation, vegetables, fruit trees, fish ponds, **can have a marked positive impact on the environment in that farm or village. However, these strategies do not seem to be widely replicable to larger areas without good access to water.** The key to spreading positive environmental impacts is to develop and apply improved fainfed farming systems that are farmer friendly (low labour, low risk, low investment), income friendly and environmentally sustainable. These systems remain elusive and variable with market fluctuations.

3. If a project is intended to have a positive impact on the environment, then the design should also contain explicit environmental objectives, as in HASD II and ULRAP. **It is necessary to monitor progress towards these objectives through the regular reporting process and to question the contractor or implementing agency if environmental issues appear to be neglected.** This lesson is drawn from the TAAEP experience where environment and gender were sidelined in smaller, lower priority activities and did not feature in regular reporting or in the Mid Term Review. Even where environmental management is integrated into other project activities, such as cropping systems, **reporting should include specific indicators of progress towards environmental objectives.**

7 CLUSTER LESSONS

7.1 Lessons

Design and Implementation

1. The most successful elements of these projects exhibit good design and implementation by skilled and motivated people. This evaluation suggests that the features of good design are:

- **explicit objectives and a realistic time frame** for the completion of complex or difficult tasks in social or institutional change. HASD II experience shows that complex projects can succeed if given time, budget and emphasis on training. The TAAEP experience shows that it is difficult to achieve institutional change in a short time, even if the task is narrow and, especially if the project and senior agency staff lack a common understanding of the task.
- **emphasis on genuine participation by local people (men and women) and close alignment with the current policies and priorities of the main implementing agency**. ULRAP clearly shows the benefits of genuine local participation (including sound gender strategies) and NGO input but it also shows the replicability downside of working with an agency constrained by regulation, policy and resources so that it cannot continue the work. The first half of TAAEP approached participation in a manner not consistent with DOAE policy or priority and so the effective project duration was halved.
- **design and prompt implementation by the one group** (including local officials and contractors). This seems to favour success when compared to separate design and implementation groups or delayed implementation. TAAEP was implemented by a different set of people some years after the original design was completed. The Project Implementation Document (PID) made some changes but clearly not enough. The other two projects flowed along smoothly with consistent management throughout the project cycle.
- **phasing out, rather than abrupt cessation of assistance, or lower level follow-up activities.** HTWD staff consider that Australian assistance to HASD II ceased abruptly and reported difficulty in their adjustment to work with fewer resources. They would have appreciated some assistance in modifying the project approach towards a lower input system. In ULRAP the continued AusAID funding of the NGO team helped to consolidate the project outcomes in community capacity, but even here the NGO team had to modify systems to work with fewer inputs. The AusAID Asset Maintenance Evaluation (AusAID 1998) focuses on problems of recurrent funding and maintenance of assets post-project. One way of addressing these problems is to ensure that the latter part of a project operates with levels of funding similar to those expected to prevail post-project, except for technical assistance.

- **effective monitoring by AusAID.** In some designs environmental, gender, or poverty alleviation objectives are integrated within other objectives and not explicit. **It is necessary to monitor progress towards these objectives, whether explicit or not, through the regular reporting process and to question the contractor or implementing agency if crosscutting issues appear to be neglected.** This lesson is drawn from the TAAEP experience where environment and gender were sidelined in smaller, lower priority activities and did not feature in regular reporting or in the Mid Term Review. More explicit statement of all objectives is preferred. However, even where crosscutting issues are integrated into other project objectives, reporting should include specific indicators of progress towards gender, environment and poverty alleviation objectives.

Targeting the Poor

2. Each of the projects targeted people in poor areas and had poverty alleviation as a priority. They did not explicitly target the very poor within project villages. **It is noted that the projects did not appear to deliver substantial direct benefits to the poorest quartile of the population in project villages.** There is an urgent need in future projects to devise practical strategies to increase participation of poorer families. It is clear that it is necessary to work with leaders to achieve a reasonable rate of growth in community development capacity. However, some part of project resources could be used to more directly address the needs of the very poor. Any such strategy should be independent of land ownership and yield reasonable returns to labour. Increasing skills through training and increasing access to capital or land through stronger VRFs are possible strategies. Assisting migration to areas with better employment prospects through relocation grants or housing support or providing educational scholarships for children of the very poor are other possible strategies. In some places livestock distribution and repayment in kind schemes are also successful in targeting people with little land.

Gender

3. One project, ULRAP, had a substantial impact on **women's participation, status and public roles.** This impact was achieved by a strategy of starting in women's groups to build confidence and moving promptly to encourage women's participation in mainstream development or local government activities. **The impact of effective gender strategies was that the overall level of local development capacity was raised more quickly and the quality or balance of local decision making was improved, compared to the likely rate of progress with male-centred strategies.** Projects that corralled women into traditional craft groups seemed to make less progress and have less active and effective local government.

Environment

4. **Village participatory land use planning can be used to protect water and forest resources where the immediate needs of people are met.** For example, development of small scale irrigation allows **people to see the longer term benefits to their village** from better conservation of soil, water or forest resources. **Conversely, it is difficult to make progress towards environmentally sustainable land use where farm families are desperately poor,** where there is no alternative employment or where income and longer term benefits are discounted heavily compared to the urgency of the next traditional crop.

5. **Strategies that rely on concentration of farming activity in smaller, higher value enterprises,** such as small scale irrigation, vegetables, fruit trees, fish ponds, can have a **marked positive impact on the environment in that farm or village. However, these strategies do not seem to be widely replicable to larger areas without good access to water.** The key to spreading positive environmental impacts is to develop and apply improved rainfed farming systems that are farmer friendly (low labour, low risk, low investment), income friendly and environmentally sustainable. These systems remain elusive but the search should continue in cooperation with ACIAR and IRCs.

Institutional

6. Within the cluster, HASD II had a substantial impact on the later work of HTWD, TAAEP contributed tools and skills that DOAE now uses and ULRAP had little impact on the later routine work of ALRO. It seems that **institutional impact on government agencies depends on the duration of the project, the rapport between project staff and agency leaders and on the quality of training provided. It also depends on maintenance of high level policy that favours the agency retaining official responsibility and resources for the kind of work or approach developed within a project.**

Incomes

7. **A large increase in community development capacity generally, in leadership skills and the status and roles of women and access to Government services, does not automatically and promptly lead to substantial increase in family income.** In the long run increased community capacity is expected to lead to better lives and higher income. However, this often requires wider adoption of more productive and environmentally sound farming systems, access to better markets or establishment of profitable non-farm enterprises. Most of these changes need access to larger amounts of investment capital than was available in these projects (for example six Tron Central Markets rather than one in TAAEP) or they require greater technical advances in rainfed farming systems than has been achieved, if family incomes are to rise substantially.

Sustainability

8. The good results of the ULRAP and HASD II projects are not being extended widely due to lack of government resources or rigidity in operating systems. Whilst the development of new approaches is always resource intensive, **project design and later year implementation should give increased attention to simplified or lower input approaches that may be more widely replicable. Gradual phasing out of Australian assistance or follow up (perhaps NGO or training support) activities may also help to focus later project years towards more sustainable methods.** In particular, projects should operate in their last year with levels of local funding similar to those expected to exist post-project.

7.2 Discussion

All of the above lessons have been drawn from experiences in the three cluster rural development projects. Most of the lessons are common sense and could be and have been drawn from other AusAID projects. The reason the lessons are not always applied to new projects varies from project to project. In some cases the design team may not be aware of the relevant lessons or may be forced to compromise to meet local priorities. In other cases implementation or budget pressures lead to inappropriate changes in approach. It is difficult for many design and implementation contractors to identify, absorb and apply the full set of AusAID policies, principles and lessons. Performance may improve if contractor terms of reference included brief summaries of the relevant lessons and design principles rather than general reference to policies. More structured monitoring of progress can help to distinguish sensible flexibility from wayward implementation of an agreed design.

Two issues deserve more consideration.

Targeting the Very Poor

Each project targeted poor regions and poor villages within those regions. The projects did not explicitly target the poorest people in those villages. This issue is raised for broader policy consideration and is not a criticism of individual project performance. The team observed that none of the three projects was very effective in directly reaching the very poor, with the partial exception of the ULRAP school lunch program.

There are two topical approaches to poverty alleviation. Recent World Bank analysis (World Bank 1998b) suggests that countries with policies that favour strong growth in GDP also reduce poverty at a higher rate than countries with low GDP growth. This approach is supported by considerable empirical evidence. The poor manage to form linkages with the higher growth and income sectors through seasonal construction employment or improved access to stronger markets for higher value products, like fruit and vegetables. These processes can be facilitated by construction of rural feeder roads

and freeing up private traders. Social safety nets or Social Investment Funds can be used to deaden the pain during the transitional phase. None of this is new in Thailand and is an exact description of the HASD II experience, where a few poor farmers became rich by supplying urban markets with vegetables and global markets with coffee, grown on project developed small scale irrigation. One interpretation of this approach is that it is unnecessary to target poorer rural people – just grow quickly and the poor will themselves access part of the wealth created (similar to the 'trickle down' theory of three decades ago).

It is true that several decades of strong economic growth in Thailand reduced rural poverty and that the recent sharp contraction will increase rural poverty. Nevertheless, even during periods of rapid economic growth, substantial numbers of very poor rural households persisted. These households tended to be those without land, with poor agricultural land relying on rainfed rice or to be households headed by women who could not so easily migrate for seasonal or urban work.

The second main approach to poverty alleviation is that promoted by many NGOs and supported by socially and environmentally sensitive urban elites in Thailand and elsewhere. This is to empower local communities, thereby increasing their capacity to mobilise local resources and to access government services. It is also common to work to reduce village reliance on external inputs, such as fertiliser, and on cash crops or marketed outputs. This approach is often accompanied by a heightened awareness of the importance of conservation of the environment. ULRAP is an example of skilled and vigorous application of this approach and it has helped middle and upper income villagers. Unfortunately, again, it is very difficult to empower the very poor as their situation means they must place a higher priority on their next meal rather than on the long term health of the land.

Observation of the three cluster projects suggests that a middle course, between the two above approaches - 'the market will take care of everything' and 'withdraw from the market and use strong social welfare and subsidies for the poor' - is desirable. Experience in these projects suggests that there should be some targeting of the very poor or they are unlikely to benefit directly from project activities. This could be achieved by requiring design teams to propose strategies for the very poor in much the same way that they have to give attention to gender and the environment.

It is very difficult to devise effective strategies to help the very poor. Such strategies should be independent of land ownership and yield reasonable returns for the labour of poor men and women. Increasing skills through education and training and increasing access to capital or land through stronger micro-credit programs are worthwhile strategies. Others could include assisting migration to areas with better employment prospects through relocation grants or housing support. Improving nutrition and providing educational scholarships for children of the very poor are other approaches that succeeded in the Ubon project. In some places livestock distribution and repayment in kind schemes are also successful in targeting people with little or no land.

AusAID should give greater attention to this issue. If such strategies are confirmed as effective in a wider sample of projects then specific, sustainable strategies should be identified and applied in future projects. In the absence of such strategies it is likely that the general experience of these projects will be repeated - low participation by the very poor and low impact on their situation.

Impact on Incomes and the Environment

Two of the projects had a moderate impact on family incomes (home consumption and cash) and the environment but only in locations where major land use change was possible (often where there was water development for vegetables, fruit trees or fish ponds). The majority of families in the project areas continue to depend on rainfed rice and upland crops for their subsistence and cash needs. Aggregate changes in land use are difficult to quantify but are considered small. Hence incomes continue to fluctuate mainly according to rice yields and prices (to a lesser extent input prices) and with availability or access to off-farm work.

If projects are to have a wider impact on family incomes and the environment designers and managers will have to be more successful in understanding and improving the dominant farming systems and land use patterns in poor areas. These are nearly always rainfed systems. The problems of rainfed farming have been addressed in the work of several International Research Centres and in some ACIAR projects. Closer linkages with ACIAR and IRC research would provide a better technical base for rainfed farming systems that improve both family income and the environment. In these projects the linkages that existed between the projects and ACIAR or IRC research were informal and indirect.

7.3 Conclusion

The evaluation considered the performance and impact of three projects with similar goals - to improve the social and economic quality of life for rural people in an environmentally sustainable fashion. They applied three quite different approaches in seeking this goal.

HASD II used an integrated area development approach, with heavy investment in physical and social infrastructure over many years, with emphasis on technical agriculture and the environment, until community participation received more attention towards the end. HASD II developed a technical and social capacity within HTWD to continue similar work.

TAAEP focused on supporting changes in the agricultural extension methodology to be used by DOAE and, at the end, on improving rural marketing. It contributed tools and training still used by DOAE and market infrastructure in one district.

ULRAP emphasised the development of the local capacity of men and women to participate in the development process and was very successful in this regard. ULRAP was innovative in the use of local NGO-like staff for community development work within a bilateral project implemented by a Government agency.

Both HASD II and ULRAP had a moderate overall impact in improving the quality of life of people in their project areas. Village leaderships were empowered and, in Ubon, broadened to include women; family incomes and the environment were improved, especially where marked change in land use was possible with water development. The projects would have had a much wider impact on the environment and incomes (cash and kind) if they had made more progress on the difficult problems of rainfed agriculture. Whatever else happens in the world, the well-being of most people in poorer, drier areas will depend upon the performance and price of their rainfed rice crop or on access to off-farm income. The way that the main crop is grown will also determine the state of the environment.

The ideal project is probably a blend of HASD II and ULRAP, with the latter's emphasis on people plus some of the investment and technical resources of HASD II. Greater impact will be achieved in the future when an active civil society (like that developed in Ubon) begins to interact effectively with well-resourced agencies like DOAE or a SIF and can access strong technical inputs from HTWD, DOAE or the private sector.

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APPENDIX 1 - TERMS OF REFERENCE

1 Background

AusAID is undertaking an ex-post evaluation of the following rural development projects in Thailand:

- Thai-Australia Highland Agricultural and Social Development Project (HASD II);
- Ubon Ratchathani Land Reform Area Development Project; and
- Thai-Australia Agricultural Extension Project.

These evaluations are being undertaken together as a cluster in a relatively short time span to make the evaluation process cost effective.

2 Evaluation objectives

The main objective of the evaluation is for AusAID and the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to assess the effectiveness of these projects in achieving their stated goals and the sustainability of development outcomes. To do this, the evaluation will need to assess project impacts and the extent to which resulting benefits are likely to be sustained. The evaluation will identify the major lessons learned that could feed into policy, planning and implementation of future projects. This will enable conclusions to be drawn about the general development worth of these types of projects. Key issues will include:

- effectiveness of the projects in terms of poverty reduction;
- broad social-economic, institutional and environmental impacts of the projects, both intended and unintended;
- the impact of the projects on women separately to men;
- project design complexity/simplicity as a factor in project success; and
- sustainability of project benefits, particularly the issues of local community participation, private sector participation, recurrent cost financing for infrastructure and changes to institutional capability. The impact of the current Asian financial situation on the government's capacity to sustain project benefits will also need to be assessed.

3 Background to the projects

3.1 Thai-Australia Highland Agricultural and Social Development Project (TA-HASD II)

The TA-HASD II project was a large and complex project that sought to intervene at several levels in the development process. It was an extension of the Highland Agricultural and Social Development (HASD) project which was financed by a World

Bank loan from 1979 to 1987, with Australian technical assistance being provided from 1982 to 1987. The HASD project was implemented in 9 zones across 5 provinces of northern Thailand and targeted about 306 villages and 52 000 people. The TA-HASD II project ran from 1988 to 1993 and covered a further 11 zones in 6 provinces and an additional 273 villages with 50 000 people. Total project cost was about AUD 23.3 million (Australia AUD14.8 million and RTG AUD8.5 million). A project completion report was prepared in October 1994.

The goal of the TA-HASD II project was 'to generate sustainable improvements in the environmental, social and economic welfare of the Highland people in Northern Thailand'. The purposes of the project were to:

- introduce sustainable farming systems to the project area;
- increase crop production for consumption and sale;
- improve the social conditions of the target group, in particular, to increase the opportunities for them to participate in development programs and in Thai society;
- strengthen the capacity of the Hill Tribe Welfare Division of the Department of Public Welfare to carry out its operations; and
- encourage line agencies to further carry out their roles in the development of the highland peoples and to assist in the coordination of these activities.

The project activities were carried out under three programs—agricultural development, community development and institutional support—and included food and cash crop production, farming systems, livestock health, extension services, watershed protection, land use planning, health and education services, access to citizenship, road access, village water supplies and regional information systems.

According to the project completion report (PCR), the project achieved and in some cases exceeded output targets. Indeed, estimates at the completion of the project indicated an economic internal rate of return of about 35 per cent. The few areas of under-achievement were primarily associated with difficulties in securing relevant cooperation and/or support from other line agencies, especially in the areas of education and the provision of road access.

3.2 Ubon Ratchathani Land Reform Area Development Project (ULRAD)

The goal of the ULRAD project was to improve the standard of living of residents in the Ubon Land Reform Area (ULRA). The broad purpose was 'to develop the capacity of poor rural communities in the ULRA to identify, plan and manage sustainable local development activities and to upgrade the Agricultural Land Reform Office's (ALRO) capacity to facilitate the provision of basic infrastructure and coordinate the response of local agencies to community needs'.

The project was to meet its goals, objectives and purposes through activities in four components:

- development of local organisations—by building the capacity of village groups to manage local level development activities;
- environmental and agricultural development—by developing effective natural resource management strategies which support environmental and agricultural development. Activities included applied research trials, agricultural extension and geographic information system development;
- physical infrastructure through the provision of appropriately constructed and well maintained infrastructure such as roads and water supply facilities; and
- program management by enhancing the capacity of ALRO and other agencies to manage and implement community based rural development programs.

The project started in 1990 and was completed in 1995. Total project cost was about AUD9.6 million (Australia AUD4.4 million and Thailand AUD5.2 million). A project completion report was prepared in February 1995.

According to the PCR, the project delivered clear financial and economic benefits to the target beneficiaries. For example, a conservative partial evaluation at project completion estimated the economic internal rate of return of 14 per cent. These impacts were claimed to be sustainable provided a modest level of assistance was continued by the ALRO for water resources and agricultural development.

3.3 Thai-Australia Agricultural Extension Project (TAAEP)

The TAAEP was an institutional strengthening project aimed at extension system improvement of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DOAE). The project operated at field level embracing 18 villages in three provinces of Thailand's lower northern region.

The project was concerned with improving agricultural practices by introducing diversified farming systems in the target areas. The target population comprised village groups and provincial extension officers. Related interest groups included local agribusiness and agricultural research centres.

The project had six outputs—planning and extension, agency liaison and cooperation, agricultural development, community development, marketing activities and project management. The activities covered included improved extension methods, extension staff training, government-private sector cooperation, cropping systems, soil conservation, fruit and vegetable production, livestock and fisheries, community group development and participation, market research, role of private sector in marketing, training in marketing systems, crop handling and storage.

The project started in 1992 and was completed in 1995. Total project cost was about AUD5.8 million (Australia AUD5.4 million and Thailand AUD0.4 million). A project completion report was prepared in March 1995.

The major strengths of the project were claimed in the PCR to be its location at field level and its use of local staff, enhancing the chances of sustainability. The major weaknesses identified in the PCR related to the inadequate integration of project activities. For example, the project did not move quickly enough into the institutional aspects of effecting changes in the extension system and initially concentrated on village activities. Moreover, the late identification and inclusion of marketing activities in the project precluded their proper use and management.

4 Scope of the evaluation

In assessing the effectiveness of the three projects in achieving their stated objectives and the sustainability of development outcomes, the evaluation will recognise the aid policies and procedures that prevailed at the time these projects were designed and implemented.

The evaluation will also examine the RTG's ability to sustain project outcomes both before and after the onset of the current Asian financial situation. The evaluation will focus on lessons for future policy and program decision-making relating to rural development activities across the agency.

4.1 Desk review

Prior to commencing field work, the evaluation team will undertake a desk study in Canberra for about eight days. During this time, the team will be briefed on the objectives and scope of the evaluation. The team will then review all the relevant project documents and prepare an issues paper which will form the basis for the field study. In particular, the issues paper will include:

- a list of the issues to be examined during the field work;
- a brief description of each project's objectives, outputs (and their quantifiable indicators), implementation issues and funding;
- a preliminary assessment of the effectiveness of these types of projects in reducing poverty and issues impacting on sustainabilty of any benefits; and
- assessment methods to be used to achieve the objectives of the evaluation (such as questionnaires and interview schedules).

The team will also prepare a draft field work itinerary for transmission to the post.

4.2 Field study tasks

The primary output of the team at the conclusion of the field study will be the draft evaluation report which has been agreed with the Task Manager and left with the AusAID Post and the recipient government for comment. The team will also prepare an aide memoire to be discussed (and possibly signed) at the wrap-up meeting. To achieve these objectives, the team will:

- meet with relevant RTG counterparts and implementing agencies to obtain their views on the performance of the projects and their benefits;
- collect an appropriate level of information relating to the current status of activities improved by or introduced by the projects;
- undertake a rapid field survey of a sample of farmers and villages targeted by the projects and those in the vicinity;
- using the projects' logframes assess the performance and development impacts of the three projects against the specified outcomes, purposes and goals. This will involve assessment of the impact on project institutions and on target beneficiaries (including at household level) from institutional strengthening, economic/financial, social and gender perspectives. The team will also comment on whether the verifiable indicators in the logframes were appropriate for assessing impacts;
- undertake cost-benefit analyses of the projects if the data are considered reasonable and acceptable;
- report on any unintended outcomes;
- assess whether the projects were consistent with AusAID's environmental and Women in Development (WID) guidelines of the time;
- assess the sustainability of each project, particularly the issues of local participation in the projects, recurrent cost financing and changes to institutional capability since Australian inputs finished;
- examine the RTG's ability to sustain project outcomes both before and after the onset of the current Asian financial situation;
- identify key lessons learned from the implementation of these projects;
- prepare a draft evaluation report in-country (including conclusions and recommendations) and provide copies to the Post and RTG for comment;
- after discussions with the Task Manager and Post, prepare an aide memoire for discussion with counterpart agencies and take account of their comments and concerns;

- on return to Australia brief AusAID and finalise the evaluation report (in close consultation with the PIA and CLTB sections) within two weeks of receiving AusAID comments on the draft; and
- following completion of the final report present a seminar to AusAID on the conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned from the evaluation study.

5 Team composition

The evaluation team will consist of a team leader and one team member. The RTG aid-coordinating agency will also be invited to provide one team member. A request will be made to counterpart agencies to provide a small number of staff to act as resource persons and interpreters, particularly for the team to conduct interviews with target beneficiaries.

The team leader will be responsible for the overall conduct of the evaluation, including allocation of team responsibilities and will report to the AusAID Task Manager. The Task Manager for this study will be Mr Rick Nicholls, PIA section, AusAID. Mr Deo Mwesigye of the same section will assist him. The Task Manager's prime responsibility will be to coordinate and oversight the work of the consultants during the desk review and in the field to ensure that the contents of the draft report, including conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned meet AusAID requirements. In addition, he will be responsible for ensuring that the final report meets AusAID's requirements for publication.

Among them, Australian team members will have high level skills and experience in the following areas:

- Planning and evaluation of complex rural development projects in Asia;
- Economic and financial analysis of projects including outcomes at household level;
- Social analysis of project outcomes including gender impacts; and
- A reasonable command of spoken Thai and an understanding of the operations of the Thai Government and its development objectives.

Team members should also have a sound general background in the following:

- AusAID requirements for reviews and evaluations;
- assessing the benefits of improved farming systems, extension services, crop production, infrastructure and marketing in project areas;
- analysing institutional impacts;
- analysing environmental impacts; and
- designing and undertaking local level surveys.

6. Study Duration

The workplan for the evaluation will consist of two phases:

- A desk review of documentation within AusAID, beginning about 15 October 1998 for about eight days; and
- A field mission, beginning about 2 November 1998, for about three weeks in country.

7 Reporting

A 30-35 page final report is expected covering all of the projects. A draft of the report will be completed in-country. The AusAID ex-post evaluation report format will be used as a framework, although the concentration will be on lessons learned and how rural development projects can be better designed and implemented in the future.

Quality Assurance Series No. 16

Targeting Poor Farmers: Contributions to Rural Development in Thailand

Northern Thailand is home to several minority groups whose traditional ways of life differ markedly from those of the Thai living in the lower plains and valleys. Despite their rich cultural and linguistic diversity, however, these northern Thai communities face serious challenges to improving their livelihoods. Low education and health services, inadequate infrastructure and difficult geographic and climatic conditions significantly disadvantage these farming communities.

Australia has been supporting efforts to improve the social and economic situation of people in the northern provinces for some years and this evaluation study considers the performance and impact of three AusAID rural development projects in northern Thailand. The three projects each had a similar goal: to improve the quality of life for rural people in an environmentally sustainable way.

The evaluation study found that two of the projects had a moderate overall impact in improving the quality of life, especially where marked changes in land use were possible as a result of water development activities. One project was highly successful in strengthening local development capacity and in increasing the status of women and their participation in social affairs.

The majority of families in the project areas will continue to depend on rainfed farming for their cash and subsistence needs. The study pointed to the need to focus on the key problems associated with rainfed agriculture in order to have a wider, more sustainable developmental impact in these regions.