

Luang Namtha

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INTRODUCTION

In Luang Namtha, where the great majority of villages have moved during the last 20 years, a problem of definition arose early on in the survey. How should we define a “resettled”, a ‘relocated’ or a ‘new’ village? Does each of these terms reflect a different reality in the field? Is it possible to clearly differentiate ‘forced’ relocations from voluntary, independent relocations which are more akin to migrations?

Firstly, it is very difficult to determine whether the relocation of a village was spontaneous or involuntary, as the answer tends to vary according to the information source, be they a government official or a villager. Several factors may lead a village to move: rapid population growth, government limits on forest clearance for slash and burn, the influence of a ‘progressive’ leader, a continuing security problem, and so on. All of these factors may be at work within a village at any one time, such that the combination of voluntary and involuntary forces precludes any objective analysis. In some instances, the authoritarian nature of the relocation has been undeniable, particularly during the period 1975-1985, but in 1996, the involuntary and the voluntary dimensions are in permanent coexistence. Should we say a village is ‘relocated’ because the government does not allow slash and burn any longer? Or that a village ‘displaces itself’ because it splits into two units owing to poor crop yield, or because its inhabitants have diverging interests?

While this report sketches out a provincial typology of new villages, a systematic classification will not be attempted. Our initial observations are based on all village units which have been in existence for less than 20 years, within which a considerable geographical and historical diversity is apparent. The villages will then be classified by comparing results gathered in each district, by referring to survey statistics concerning the needs of villages, and by examining the motivations of the relevant actors, be they Lao officials or foreigners.



I. HUMAN DYNAMICS OF THE REGION

Luang Namtha has 114,519 inhabitants, (58,631 women and 55,888 men) in 20,580 family units, over a total area of 9,325 km², making it the 14th largest province in Laos. Since the 1985 census the population has grown 1.7%, while the density has increased from 10.41 to 12.28 inhabitants per km², which makes it, along with Sekong and Attapeu, one of the most thinly populated provinces in the country¹. This part of Laos, along with the modern province of Bokeo, constituted the province of Houakrong, known as Upper Mekong during the period of the French protectorate, until 1983.

A/ INTRODUCTION: A POPULATION IN CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION DURING THE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

Luang Namtha is very mountainous, with altitudes ranging from 600 m to 2,130 m. The two large plains of Namtha and Sing are the economic and administrative centres of the province, these two districts (muang) representing 50% of the population. Following depopulation due to war from the late 1950s to the late 1970s, these districts have seen steady population growth, with the return of refugees - mostly Tai Dam and Tai Nyouan who fled to Bokeo province - and the relocation of a number of highland villages to the lowlands. Geographical conditions today dictate that village relocations move mainly in one direction.

With the exception of the two large plains, 90% of the remaining area is mountainous. Vieng Pou Kha and Long districts do have some scattered and narrow valleys, converted into rain fed paddy fields, often just around the district town, whereas in Nale 98% of arable land is used for slash and burn. These three districts represent, respectively, 19%, 13% and 18% of the total provincial population.

In Laos, Luang Namtha is officially the province with the highest number of ethnic minorities - although the number may vary from 21 to 43, depending on the informant or author and the typology they use! The most numerous groups are the Khmu and the Lamet (Austro-Asiatic groups), the Akha, the Kouï and the Lahu (Tibeto-Burman), the Hmong and the Yao (Miao-Yao), and the Tai Dam, Tai Deng, Tai Neua, Tai Nyouan and Tai Leu (Tai Kadai). Each of these large ethnolinguistic groups represents a different period in the peopling of the province. The Austro-Asiatic groups have been there longest and are nowadays concentrated in the south of the province. Beginning in the 10th century, Tai-Kadai speaking groups progressively took control of the plains. Finally, in the 19th century, Tibeto-Burman and Miao-Yao groups migrating from China and Burma began to occupy mountainous regions in the west and north of the province. Generally, each minority follows its own migration pattern, with the original village splitting into one or two new units, depending on the type of agriculture it practices and the frequency of trade with neighbouring peoples.

Because of its geographical position as a crossroads between China, Burma and Thailand, Luang Namtha has for centuries been a place of trade and movement to and fro. Numerous mule trails, nowadays simply footpaths, once criss-crossed the province linking Siamese, Burmese and Chinese border posts, together with those of Oudomxai province. French administrators in charge during the time of the protectorate stressed the important part played by these local lines of communication. Between the 15th and 17th centuries the province also saw several invasions from China, Burma and Siam pass through, about which little information has yet been collected. This special socio-economic and political background gave rise, notably among lowland populations, to a tendency towards mobility. Village relocation occurred for many reasons, resulting in a highly unsettled population.

Population movements today are therefore not new to the region, where migrations and trade have gone on for centuries. On the other hand, it cannot simply be said that history is repeating itself, since motivations for relocations from 1975 onwards differ greatly from those of the pre-revolutionary period.

¹1995 census figures.

B/ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO VILLAGE RELOCATION SINCE 1975

At the provincial level, village movements cannot readily be divided into major historical phases that are independent of one another. The following chronology makes sense only if it is borne in mind that certain types of relocation may have occurred during various periods simultaneously. For example, certain relocations which were ordered by the provincial authorities and initiated mainly between 1975 and 1977, are still going on, but the methods and the arguments used to justify the movements have changed. The objective is no longer security, but to gain access to the village for development purposes, or to stop deforestation. Conversely, the voluntary relocation of villages in search of a new lifestyle did not suddenly start at the beginning of the 1990s. At various times since the end of the independence struggle, various leaders who participated in the revolutionary process have decided to change the location and way of life of their villages.

1. From the mid-1960s: Relocation and integration of ethnic revolutionaries

When the Lao Issala liberated the province in 1962, a large number of Tai villages from Muang Sing and Muang Namtha fled to Houeisai, leaving behind their paddy fields and their homes. From the early 1970s, these areas were occupied by people who had fought for the revolution, mainly Austro-Asiatics from the mountainous area which separates modern-day Oudomxai and Luang Namtha provinces. Only a few families from the villages involved in this first wave of relocations - the present governor is from one of them - took up the suggestion of the new administration, and were given substantial logistical support. Families which volunteered were transported by military truck from Muang Beng, in the south of the modern province of Oudomxai, to Luang Namtha via the road network constructed by the Chinese in the 1960s. In this way the revolutionary administration hoped to reward the minorities who had fought for it, and at the same time to make an easy start to the land collectivisation program in the plains. In Sing and Namtha districts, a number of Akha villages which had contributed to the victory of the revolutionary forces were also able to settle in valleys where the government offered them land.

2. 1975-1977: Nation building and war against anti-revolutionary subversives

Although the revolution had been victorious in 1975, south-west Luang Namtha province was not completely pacified until the late 1970s. Paramilitary troops trained by the Americans and supported from abroad formed counter-revolutionary groups and continued to stage attacks on Lao territory. Based in Vieng Pou Kha and Long districts, the rebels looked for support among neighbouring Khmu, Hmong, Yao, Lamet and Lahu villages. In some instances, they forcibly requisitioned food and men. In order both to supervise the villages and cut off supplies to the rebels, the government decided to remove all villages from unsecured areas to sites along the main roads.

Ban Oudomxin, a Yao village in Muang Sing - which has since split into four units - was relocated for this reason, with military trucks arriving to gather the villagers and remove them from their village. More than half the villages now settled along the edges of the road between Namtha and Vieng Pou Kha were similarly relocated during this period. The same thing was observed in the north of Muang Nale among the populations of Khouene and Khmu Nyouan. This phase of relocation seems to have been difficult for most of the affected villages, which lost a large part of their population and their cultural heritage in the process.

The campaign against the subversive groups lasted until the mid-1980s, notably in Muang Vieng Pou Kha, and was used to justify the removal and regroupment of the villages to their inhabitants. With the exception of some emergency aid - rice, quilts for the cold season, and some livestock - these villages received no external support.

3. 1977-1985: Return of the Tai peoples and continuing depopulation of mountainous areas in the south of the province

Together with the government territorial security policy, the period 1975-1985 was marked by a 'second generation' of relocations, which were more or less directly related to the earlier phase, or fell within the framework of regional land development.

When the Tai populations who had fled the fighting at the beginning of the 1960s gradually returned to their homes, they found their lands occupied by Austro-Asiatic peoples who had come up from the south at the urging of the revolutionary administration. The legislative framework had not been modified at that time, so cultivating a paddy field in the absence of its owner did not confer ownership of that field, even after a number of years. From a legal point of view, nothing could prevent the Tai Nyouan, the Tai Leu and the Tai Dam villagers from reoccupying their old lands. Furthermore, as the experience with collectivisation had not been successful, the government no doubt welcomed the return of a population which would be easy to control and which possessed a long held knowledge of rain fed rice cultivation.

From the beginning of the 1980s, a new series of relocations began to take place among villages which had already been relocated and now found themselves dispossessed of lands which they had occupied for about 10 years. The great majority of these were Khmu, although a number of Tai Khao, originally from Luang Prabang province but who had come to Namtha during the 1960s, also found themselves in the same situation.

The first group were sent (or rather, sent back) to Nale, on the banks of the Tha river, with a few cows given by the provincial government as compensation for the loss of their paddy fields, or to Muang Sing, where a small Austro-Asiatic population had existed in the north of the plain since the early 1950s. Some villagers joined the ranks of the provincial administration. The second group were offered a few paddy fields in Muang Long, where the Tai speaking population was at that time very small. The Tai Khao opened new land, making it possible to build settlements along the edges of the trail. In this way the movement of villages became a special tool serving a political mission to manage and take control of territory.

At the same time as these relocations in the plains and valleys, two kinds of relocation were taking place in the southern mountains.

Some villages continued leaving the highlands to settle along the trails. Pressure exerted by the administration doubtless played an important role in many cases, but other relocations were simply a consequence of earlier migrations. In some places it became impossible to go on living in areas when neighbouring villages had already left, breaking the trade network and leaving those who remained feeling completely isolated. Many Khmu Nyouan and Khouene villages from Nale and Vieng Pou Kha districts came down to the valleys under these circumstances.

Other villages which had already relocated or gathered in valleys with other villages, moved out and settled along main roads, so as to relieve population and land pressure in temporary postwar settlements. In some cases, they were fleeing sites where too many villagers had died.

4. 1985-1996: Emergence of a new policy and new needs

In the last 10 years, according to officials, villages have been moving exclusively on their own initiative. The provincial Rural Development Committee cites three main factors which incite villagers to relocate:

The government "authorises and facilitates" relocations, within the limits of its means.

Villagers move away to avoid working longer hours, due to soil degradation and having to travel greater and greater distances to their fields.

A new generation of villagers refuses to stick to 'the old ways', striving for new jobs, new skills and closer proximity to infrastructure and public services.

These arguments relate mainly to themes in provincial development, themes which are raised by provincial officials in the course of meetings with villagers or with foreign aid workers. In most cases, officials seek to convince their audience of the necessity, in the villagers' own interest, of pursuing the policy of relocation followed since independence. At the same time they seek the support of the various development agencies to make it more effective. At the level of the village community, this approach finds some resonance among the youth, as it emphasises the possibilities of external aid which may come as a result of relocation, as well as the ease of access to consumer goods sold in the marketplace. The youngest villagers then seek to convince the least willing - often the elders - by translating and reiterating the 'progressive' line of the officials. The chapter dealing with the role of international aid and institutions shows that the more recently relocated villages have received external aid more quickly than the others, as these relocations have been effected on the basis of promises made by the government. In this sense, the present period differs from the preceding one, in which foreign aid was absent.

a) Improving village access for public services

During a recent meeting in which the Luang Namtha Provincial Development Plan up to 2000 was presented, the Vice-Governor explained that where provincial services were not able to reach villages, the villages would have to make themselves accessible. This style of logic is an accurate reflection of the current government approach to national development, which stresses first and foremost the settlement of new villages along the edges of trails in order to facilitate access. The next priority is to regroup all the small villages around more important centres so as to maximise use of infrastructure constructed by the government, such as health centres and schools.²

Village name	Date of construction of the school
Ban Namleuang Mai	1983
Ban Namtalan	1991
Ban Nampick	1984
Ban Pakha	1990

Out of only four villages in Muang Namtha which have primary schools constructed since 1975, all are along the road and are of recent construction. The same tendency to favour new villages which are accessible by road the year round is apparent in Muang Sing.

According to the government, better access to villages will increase the efficacy of public services, creating a new generation of citizens and eliminating ethnic divisions, with all the inhabitants adopting a Lao lifestyle. Advocating settlements alongside main roads is a policy common to all districts. The theme of easier access is also related to methods of cultivation, with roads frequently being built along the valley floor where flat areas, once developed, will permit the gradual abandonment of slash and burn.

b) Sedentarisation and abandonment of slash and burn

The image of the Lao forest until very recently was of an inexhaustible supply of food and building materials, which at the same time was the edge of the civilised world as symbolised by the muang, a dark realm into which lowland people projected their fears and fantasies. When the war of independence came to an end and the idea of the nation state was adopted, the forest began to acquire a different status, that of a national resource, a public property to be exploited and at the same time protected. Slash and burn came to be seen as a serious danger, and its total eradication by 2000 became one of the government's main goals.

In their discussions with villagers, officials often compare the meagre, irregular returns from hai with the food security which comes from a good paddy field. Stricter law enforcement for clearing land induces most villages to opt more and more for sedentary agriculture and, therefore, valley settlement. However, relocation does not mean the villagers change their cultivation habits immediately. In Muang Namtha, all recently

² Such a geographical rupture makes it impossible to preserve traditional links between villages. In such cases, relocations have been accompanied by a loss of cultural referents.

resettled villages along the road still practice slash and burn while slowly converting land to paddy fields, as the provincial Agriculture Department is not always in a position to help them. For numerous recent settlements, trying to switch to new modes of cultivation is very difficult (see Chapter 2) and takes several years, during which time the villagers' existence is extremely precarious. For some villages the arrival in the valley is a bitter disappointment, with the promised ricefields turning out to be tiny plots of swampy land.

Because the lowlands of the province were, until recently, underpopulated relative to their agricultural potential - particularly in the case of the Muang Sing plain - a phenomenon of 'paddy field grabbing' began to appear in 1975. This became more pronounced between 1992 and 1995, when numerous Akha villages which lacked land in the highlands, relocated themselves to the plain in the hope of finding unoccupied fields. (Whether this was entirely voluntary or because of pressure exerted by certain government departments, notably that of Agriculture and Forestry, is again very difficult to determine.) When the initial years in the lowlands or beside the trail proved too difficult, some villages returned to their original areas. At least 2,000 Hmong villagers also arrived after the Vice-Governor of the province, himself a Hmong, announced on the radio that there was plenty of spare land close to the district capital. Finally, several Leu, Phou Noi and Ho villages also left their home provinces to seek new land on the Muang Sing plain.

c) Eradication of opium cultivation

Stricter control of areas where poppy is cultivated is also one of the principal objectives of relocation. When Ban Sophi settled beside the road in 1993, the Agriculture Department arrived to destroy plants which could easily be seen from the road. Nevertheless, provincial officials realise that a gradual approach is essential, as some villages will increase their production to cover rice deficits suffered in the early years following resettlement.

d) Conclusion

Recently there has been a tendency for 'progressive' ideas to spread amongst the younger members of ethnic minorities. Moreover, the problems of land pressure owing to demographic growth and a stricter application of the law with regard to slash and burn have brought about the relocation of many villages, sometimes from provinces other than Luang Namtha, in search of arable land in the lowlands.

C/ GEOGRAPHY OF RELOCATIONS SINCE 1975

1. Muang Namtha

According to statistics provided by the government, village relocations between 1975 and 1995 involved 24,951 people in a district with a total population of 35,179, in other words, 71% of the population! The chart at the end of Chapter 1 summarises these movements and shows that the great majority occurred before 1985.

The Tai Nyouan and Tai Dam alone account for 65% of relocations. The Tai Nyouan came back to their paddy fields in 1975 after staying for 10 years in Houeisai town. Half of the Tai Dam did the same; the other half of the population left the plain for only a few years, taking refuge in the surrounding mountains and surviving with the help of Khmu villagers. Some of the Tai Dam joined the revolutionary forces, so that a few of them remained in the province between 1965 and 1975.

Among the Austro-Asiatic people affected by relocation, about 2,500 altogether, three trends are apparent:

The Khmu Rok originating from the south-east of Muang Nale who came to settle on the plain at the request of the new administration mostly settled at Ban Donmoun, essentially a military village, in the south of the main plain. Others had to leave again in 1983 for the Namtha escarpment, further south, after the return of the Tai Nyouan.

The Khouene, mostly originating from Muang Vieng Pou Kha, settled all over the province. Some of them had lived for several years at Houeisai.

In 1985, 522 Khmu from Oudomxai settled in the district. We have no information about them.

The statistics provided by the province do not mention the many small hamlets, most of them consisting of fewer than 20 houses, which have sprung up between 1984 and 1994 along the road leading to Muang Sing. Most of them are inhabited by Austro-Asiatic families originating from Nale who have lived for a few years in Luang Namtha. Nowadays they are seeking new lands and are adopting a more modern lifestyle, with the help of family links to various officials. Their principal occupation is raising livestock and caring for cattle belonging to the military camp at Km 21.5 (from Namtha) and to provincial officials. It is certain that these hamlets will be moved again in the next few years under the policy of regroupment of small villages. At the same time, the creation of a state park and the construction of a dam are planned for this area.

Relocated villages belonging to other ethnic minorities account for only a small percentage of the total population.

Two Hmong villages were relocated in 1975 and 1983, the first from the Pakta region of Bokeo province. The second one was already settled in the district before its move.

Three Lanten villages totalling 736 people settled closer to the main roads: one of them moved barely a year ago.

Finally, a fairly large Akha village, Ban Lakram (34 families), began to settle near the road to Muang Sing in 1986. In the early 1990s, the villagers returned to their old village several times because living conditions in the valley became too harsh. The European Union (EU) has been working on the site for two years.

2. Muang Sing

The number of inhabitants who have already relocated is less significant here than in Muang Namtha, although it still makes up 44% of the total population.⁴ 50 villages out of the 114 that make up the district were relocated between 1975 and 1996, 33 of them in the years 1975-1985. As in Muang Namtha, the main plain attracts most resettlements but, due partly to a more favourable natural environment and partly to severe land pressure around the district capital, heads of rural development nowadays direct villagers towards other areas in the north and west of the district (see part III).

a) Relocations from 1975 to 1985

These essentially concern the Akha subgroups who traditionally lived in the mountains west of the district capital. 28 Akha villages (1,073 families, 5,498 people) left the highlands during this period and started to work in paddy fields. Mostly heading towards the Muang Sing plain, these migrations were frequently accompanied by considerable human losses. Some valleys to the north and west of Muang Sing were also involved. The district administration claims that these relocations were all voluntary.

Four Yao villages (700 people) were also relocated from Vieng Pou Kha during this period because of their links to the counter-revolutionary guerillas. Removed in trucks by the army, dozens of villagers' lives were lost in the months following the relocation. Today they are divided into four villages, all situated 10 km from the district capital, and have managed to stabilise their population growth and establish ownership of their land.

Finally, 23 Khmu families originally from Nale resettled at Ban Tchom and began to develop paddy fields. These villagers formed the bulk of the population which arrived at Muang Namtha at the end of the war, only to have to relocate once again when the Tai Dam and Tai Nyouan returned from Bokeo.

⁴According to figures supplied by the province, the number of persons now living in the district who have left their original village in the last 20 years is 10,540 out of a total of 23,557 individuals.

Villages of Sing District (to be read with the table of displacements, appendices of Chapter one)



b) Between 1985 and 1996

17 villages were relocated in this period. Compared to the preceding period, fewer villagers were affected by relocation, although their diversity in terms of ethnicity and place of origin was greater.

The nine Akha villages relocated during this period today occupy for the most part the rice growing areas to the west of the plain. Officially, these relocations were motivated by a unified desire on the part of the villagers to change their lifestyle. In all, 37 Akha villages have come to settle in the lowlands since 1975.

Four Hmong villages comprising 2,250 people were created in 1993 following a sudden migration which took the provincial authorities by surprise. These villagers had heard the Vice-Governor of the province announce on the radio that there was plenty of spare land in Muang Sing, and consequently left their home provinces - Luang Prabang for some, Houaphan, Xieng Khouang and even Vientiane for others. After hiring a collective car, they arrived to take possession of the 'promised lands'. The reality was less inspiring and, after three years, the situation of the new villages is still of great concern, especially from the point of view of sanitation. The villagers appear to have sold off many of their assets to get them through the difficult early years, and possess no buffalo. All of these communities have settled along the road leading to Long, to the south of Muang Sing.

Other migrants - Ho, Tai Dam, Leu and Khmu - came from the same home province of Phongsaly, and the same motivation for moving. All of them explained that they were forced to leave their old villages due to pressure on the land. This no doubt results partly from population growth in these villages, and partly from the strict application of laws designed to reduce slash and burn. These recent migrations have not given rise to a multi-ethnic community, as each group has occupied an area separate from the others. Most of these villagers, with the exception of the Leu, have built their houses at Ban Xiengtchay, close to the market.

3. Muang Long

This district is the only one in the province we were unable to reach due to a shortage of time and the extreme difficulty of access during the rainy season - it is cut off from the rest of the province for more than six months of the year. The trail leading to the district capital should soon be upgraded thanks to a World Bank loan. For the time being, district officials, who must attend meetings in the provincial capital from May to October, have to walk for two days to get there. Isolated from the districts of Laos which border their own, the inhabitants of Long have regular contact with the Burmese population across the Mekong, and with Bokeo province, accessible by boat all year round. The statistics provided by the district demonstrate the influence of this unique geographical situation.

a) Between 1975 and 1985, 43 villages, about 6,000 people, were relocated within the district.

Leu villagers alone make up 45% of this total. District leaders say that most of them are people who left the area in 1967-1968 for Bokeo. These relocations would have been caused by counter-revolutionary military activity. Starting in 1975, the inhabitants gradually returned to their old villages.

At the same time, about 2,500 Akha villagers, 500 Kouï and 500 Hmong were reported to have resettled inside the district between 1975 and 1985. Their movements and their motivations have not been recorded.

b) During the same period, 63 villages were reported to have come from outside the district.

38 of these, mostly Akha, would have come from eastern Burma and settled in the north-west of the district. The same thing probably also happened in Muang Sing, although the head of the Statistics Department did not mention it. If such a migration did indeed take place, it may explain the 'paddy land race' apparent since 1975 among Akha people near Muang Sing. These people have been settled in Laos for a long time, and may have been pushed eastwards by the new arrivals.

Other villages that settled in Muang Long at this time, 27 in total, came from Muang Sing. 2,318 Akha villagers and 772 villagers referring to themselves as "Doi" settled in the north of Muang Long. These people, as a general rule, settled alongside the trails.

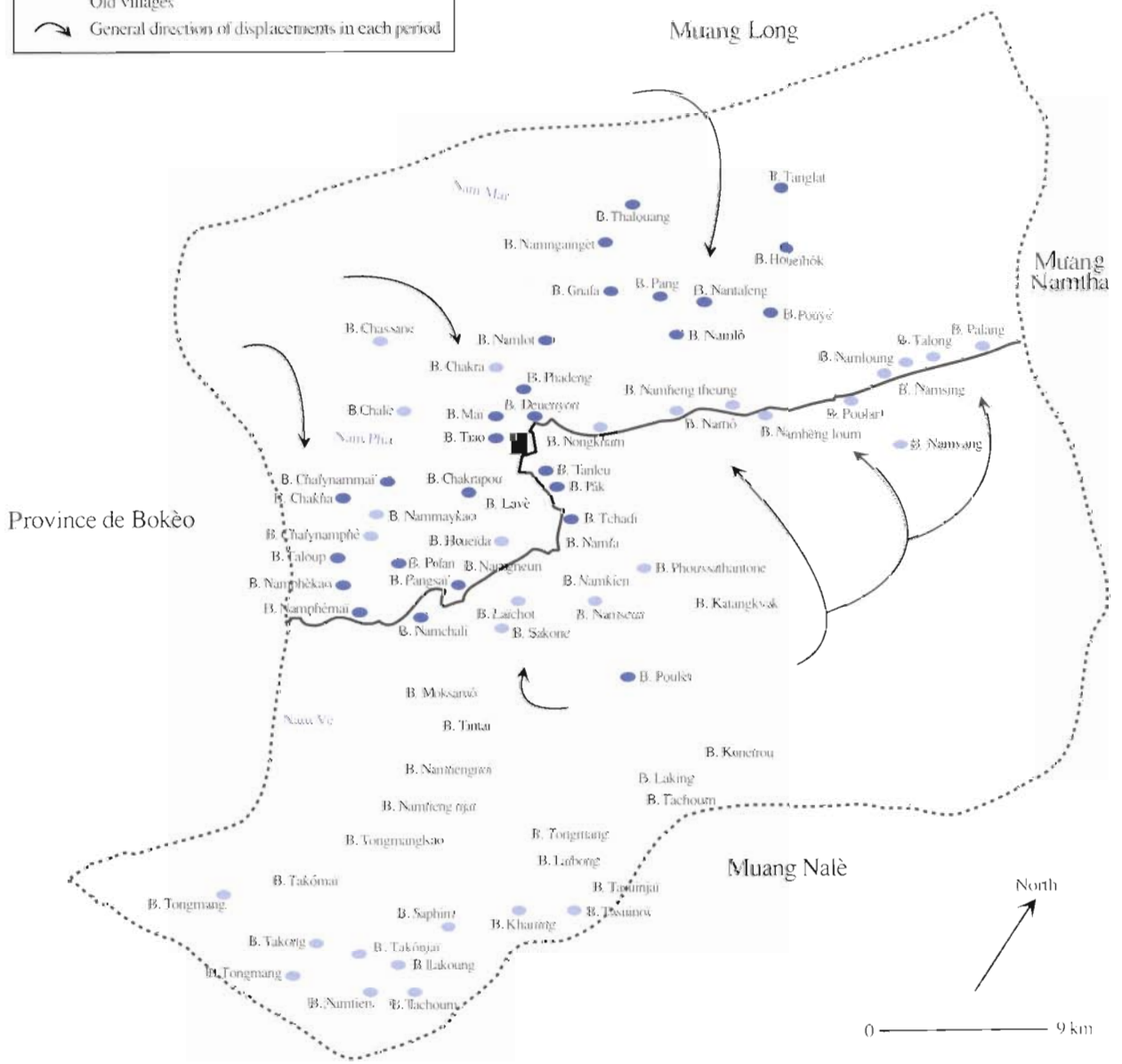
Vieng Pou Kha District : Geographic distribution of displaced villages

from the Education Service Map of 1991

Key

- District boundaries
- Main road
- District town
- At least 10 years at current site
- At least 20 years at current site
- Old villages
- ↷ General direction of displacements in each period

Note : the map applies to the tables in chapter 1 appendices



c) Comparatively, there seem to have been fewer relocations between 1985 and 1995.

Four villages were reported to have left Sing and Namtha districts and settled in the main valley of Muang Long. 953 Tai Khao people, 800 Tai Dam and 560 Yao thus would have migrated to the west of the province. The Tai Khao and Tai Dam populations had originally come from Luang Prabang province and occupied paddy land on the Namtha plain, land which they were forced to vacate on the return of its previous owners, the Tai Nyouan.

Making a simple calculation on the basis of these statistics, we can see that relocations - within the district, from a neighbouring district or even from a foreign country - in Muang Long have involved 18,059 people, or 84% of today's total population! Moreover, 90% of the relocations took place between 1975 and 1985. During this first phase, the role of the state seems to have been weak and most of the relocations occurred in a fairly anarchic fashion. In the second phase, the relocations, less numerous but more organised, became an instrument for the management and control of territory: by settling in underpopulated valleys and beside trails, the Tai populations made for the 'domestication' of the province.

The statistics provided by the district authorities do not mention the relocation of villages to neighbouring districts. Thus far these have been relatively few, mostly at the beginning of the 1990s when numerous Lahu and Akha villages left to settle in Muang Vieng Pou Kha.

4. Muang Vieng Pou Kha

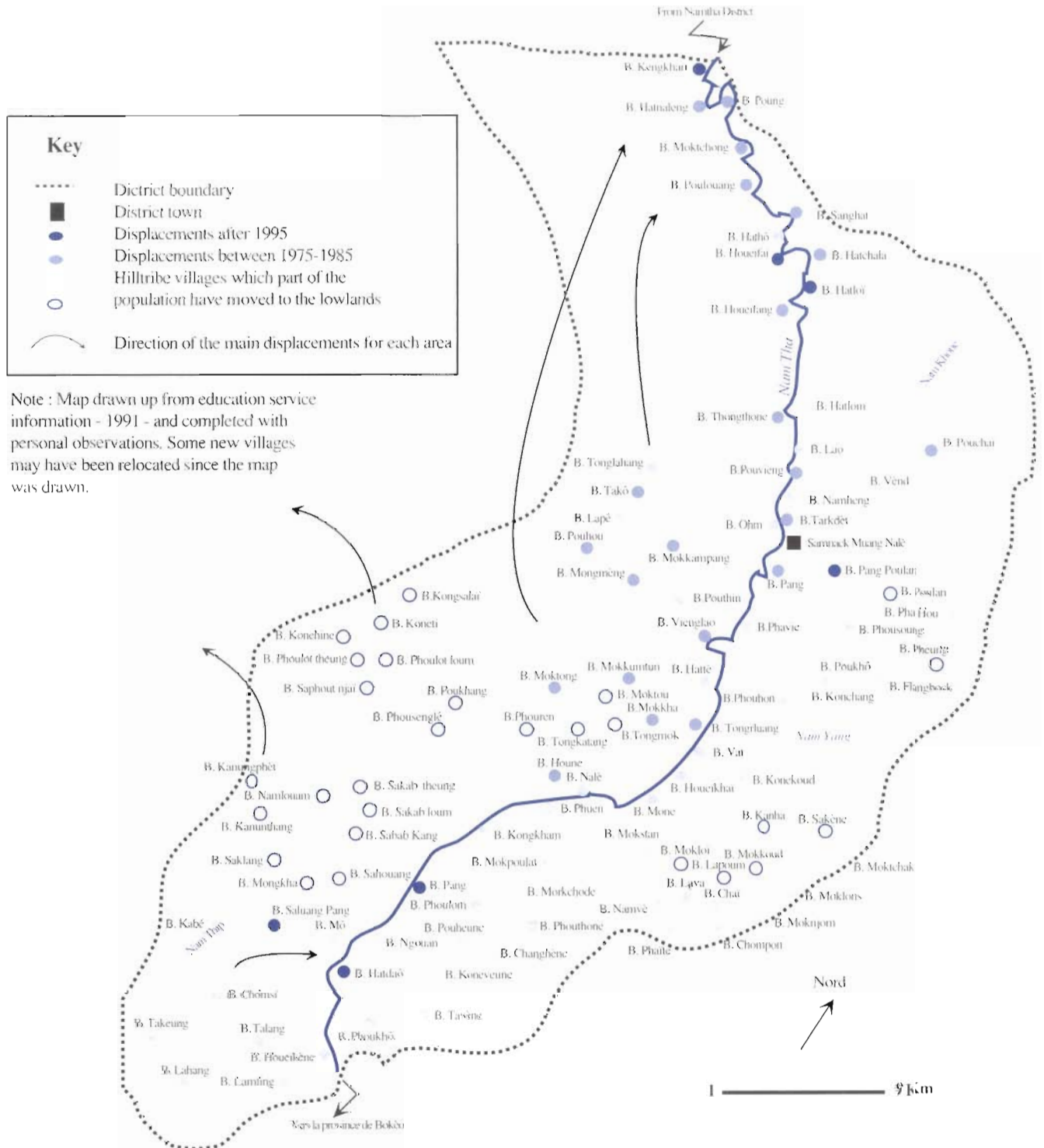
Situated on a plateau surrounded by mountains, this district must have been a historical centre of some importance after the 15th century, and for a long time was a staging post for caravans coming from Yunnan. Passing from the control of the Nyouan to the Burmese and then the Siamese, this region has only been part of Laos for a century. During the French protectorate, a network of dirt roads was laid out mostly using the labour of the local Austro-Asiatic population. These routes, now abandoned, made it possible to reach Muang Sing or Houeisai from the centre of the district in two days. The French and the Americans also constructed several small airfields from which air raids on Namtha and Yunnan were mounted during the war of decolonisation. When the plateau was taken over by the Lao Issala, Vieng Pou Kha was heavily bombed.

Support for the counter-revolutionaries among several ethnic groups and the continuation of guerilla activity until the mid-1980s led the new administration to take a firm line with regard to the highland villages, and many were forcibly relocated at the end of the war. Many villages also decided to leave the area, some for Bokeo, others for refugee camps in Thailand. Today, Vieng Pou Kha is the least populous district of Luang Namtha (14,873 inhabitants, 13% of the provincial total), and, along with Long, the most difficult of access during the rainy season. During the summer all the traders leave the district - most of them come from Namtha - and the market is practically deserted. A chicken costs Kip 3,000, and a duck Kip 4,000. A two-lane highway is under construction linking Namtha to Houeisai and, in effect, Yunnan to Thailand. A Chinese company has commenced construction of bridges in the north of the district, while a Thai enterprise has built a good track as far as the coal mine which it has been operating for two years, 15 km south of the district capital.

The district administration was not able to supply us with statistics as detailed as those for Sing or Namtha. Nevertheless, on the basis of the information in their possession and that collected during visits to villages, three main types of relocation seem to be identifiable.

a) Forced relocations at the end of the war involving at least 14 village units, mostly Khmu Nyouan and Hmong. To this figure must be added those which relocated to other districts, for example the Yao population now settled close to the Chinese border at Sing. These relocations were organised hurriedly, first by moving the people to an assembly site, then distributing them along roadsides. (Most of the Khmu Nyouan and Khouene villages belong to this category.) Loss of life was high in most of the relocated villages during this period, with some of them returning to the mountains as a result.

Nalè district, geographical position of displaced villages from the Education service map, 1991



b) From the mid-1980s, the involuntary nature of the relocations becomes less clear-cut. A new generation of villagers wants to change its way of life, to get closer to the roads and to possess paddy fields. At the same time, the authorities wish to stop slash and burn and achieve better control of areas that are still insecure. About 10 villages belong to this category of relocation, most of them Khmu Nyouan.

c) The 1990s thus far have been characterised by a greater diversity, both in terms of the ethnicity of affected villages, and of the regions where they have resettled. Relatively depopulated since the war, the north and the west of the district are nowadays seeing more Akha and Lahu villages coming to settle in the still empty hills or small valleys, having left Sing or Long districts due to inadequate land in their home village. Still, the district leader, Khamsay Viphounpouthai, says that these days he has to refuse requests from some villages wishing to settle in the area due to a shortage of available land.

In total, 11 villages were reported to have been relocated since 1990 (22 according to our own count). Most of them have come from the eastern part of the district - Lahu, Khoui and Akha villages - and settled on the banks of the Nam Pha, formerly home to Yao villagers and a priority development zone for the district. The other villages relocated since 1990 have arrived in the east of the district and are looking to settle along the road. These are Khmu villages leaving the progressively less populated areas along the border with Muang Nale.

5. Muang Nale

Nale is situated in the south-east of Luang Namtha province, and consists of a large valley formed by the Nam Tha. The valley is narrow in the north and south but somewhat wider in the centre, and as a result of these topographic conditions, has no paddy fields. (The Leu, traditionally considered a lowland group, here practice slash and burn exclusively, as does the Austro-Asiatic population.) Nale contains 18% of the provincial population and has a gender imbalance that is more pronounced than in the rest of the province, with 9,475 men to 11,142 women.

Created in 1983 from the merging of the western areas of Oudomxai province and the eastern foothills of the Vieng Pou Kha plateau, Nale's existence as a cohesive entity barely dates beyond the time it became a district of Luang Namtha province. The Nam Tha, which traverses the length of the district and which for the moment represents the sole means of access, for years served as the frontier between the kingdoms of Nan and Lane Xang. The paths linking Vieng Pou Kha to the Nam Tha were plied by caravans which would descend by river to Pat Tha and thence to Thailand or Luang Prabang, but which never crossed the territories on the left bank of the river. Similarly, during the last war, the modern district of Nale was the scene of quite violent encounters between the troops of the Lao Issala on the left bank, and the counter-revolutionary guerillas on the right bank. The Nam Tha was a true frontline at that time.

More so here than in the other districts of the province, the events which took place between 1960 and 1975 seem to provide a key to an understanding of the village relocations which took place afterwards: By fighting on the winning side, the Austro-Asiatic populations on the left bank gained political representation at the provincial and district level, paddy fields at Namtha (for some of them, at least), more schools than the right bank, and, finally, the chance to refuse to relocate their village if a majority of the population opposed the move. The villages remain at their original sites, but population growth has been curbed considerably by a rural exodus linked to political integration.

In the areas along the right bank, the situation is reversed. More than half the villages have been relocated towards the river or Vieng Pou Kha for military reasons, few schools have been constructed and there are no villagers at high levels of the provincial administration. The old Khmu Nyouan area is today completely isolated, and officials visit it rarely. Few villages now remain at their original sites.

The case of the Leu villages softens this dichotomy somewhat. Thanks to the lam system, the Leu formerly controlled the hilltribe populations, on whom they could impose certain corvees and taxes. With the disappearance of this system in 1975, the Leu stood to lose their local influence, as they had for the most part collaborated with the counter-revolutionary forces. Nevertheless they retain key posts in the provincial

government and still control the river navigation. With the exception of villages which split into different units for internal reasons such as population pressure, the Leu were little affected by the relocations that took place upon Liberation.

a) Between 1975 and 1985, village populations generally moved from the hills on the left bank to the north of the district, which was not heavily populated in 1975 because of numerous rapids which obstruct navigation on the Nam Tha for much of the year.

According to district statistics, 20 villages were reportedly relocated between 1975 and 1985, mostly for security reasons. The list of village names provided by the district shows that every village came from the right bank of the Nam Tha, while the large majority of relocated people were Khmu Nyouan. Out of 4,082 relocated villagers, 1,951, or 47%, were Khmu Nyouan, and about 1,000, or 24%, were the Austro-Asiatic Khouene who also lived west of the Nam Tha

b) Between 1985 and 1996, 10 new villages were relocated and/or regrouped to form a larger settlement, still mostly from villages on the right bank. Nevertheless the growth of the population often brings land scarcity and problems in the provision of water. In the meantime, villages relocated during the former period moved again, mostly splitting up into smaller units, fleeing from illnesses encountered at the first site in the valley, heading for the new trail under construction, or once again seeking new land where they could practice slash and burn.

Altogether, nearly 2,100 people were relocated between 1986 and 1996. At least 40% were Khmu Nyouan. Lamet people are also involved, since three villages have started to build temporary dwellings near the river. Some of them, formerly counted in Muang Vieng Pou Kha but situated several days walk from the administrative centre, now belong to Nale following a modification of the district boundaries.

D/ CONCLUSION: SOME THOUGHTS ON A TYPOLOGY OF RELOCATIONS AT LUANG NAMTHA

At the end of this first section, population movements in the province appear to be characterised by a diversity that cannot be explained by any single factor, be it ethnicity, location, motivation, or historical period. We shall therefore compile the information already outlined into a table which takes into account the main human, historical and geographical aspects of the relocations. Even if it is not possible to build a precise typology of population movements, there are a number of keys which can be deployed to reduce the diversity.⁵

Reading from this table, it seems possible to divide village relocations into three main groups:

Relocations related to the war or to a long period of insecurity in the area of origin - flight, forced relocation, access to paddy land after the departure of the owners.

'Second generation' relocations, indirectly linked to the first type of relocation - populations spreading out from the first gathering of settlements, and relocations from the mountains to the plains (or vice versa) because of the return of the original owners of the paddy fields or owing to difficult living conditions in the valley.

Relocations related to the policy to eradicate slash and burn and/or excessive land pressure.

Such a typology shows that there are relocations which are caused by internal factors such as population pressure in relation to available land, or the presence of a 'progressive' faction encouraging the more conservative elements to move. Others are motivated by external factors, such as the direct intervention of the army to enforce the prohibition on clearing new areas of forest. In 1996, both elements are closely entwined, and it is very difficult to determine which weighs more heavily on the decision of the villagers.

The Khmu Rok are a special case. Just after the war, a number of families responded to the call of the new government and went to cultivate paddy fields on the Namtha plain. Even so, no settlement was relocated in its entirety, with only a few families leaving from each village.

⁵ The last column of the table shows the number of people involved in relocation. These figures are intended simply to give an idea of magnitude in order to be able to compare the different categories. Long months of research would no doubt be required to be able to present truly accurate statistics for each ethnic group, each region and each historic period.

Nor do relocations of entire village units make up the majority of cases. Often only part of the village will move, especially in the case of a village whose population has outstripped its agricultural resources. In the case of villages forcibly relocated at the end of the war, a real breakdown of the old unit would take place. Assembled into temporary villages between 1975 and 1977, the populations were then once again divided up into small groups and distributed among other settlements, or indeed other districts. A desire to make it impossible for the population to reunite in a single new village seems to have motivated this dispersion.

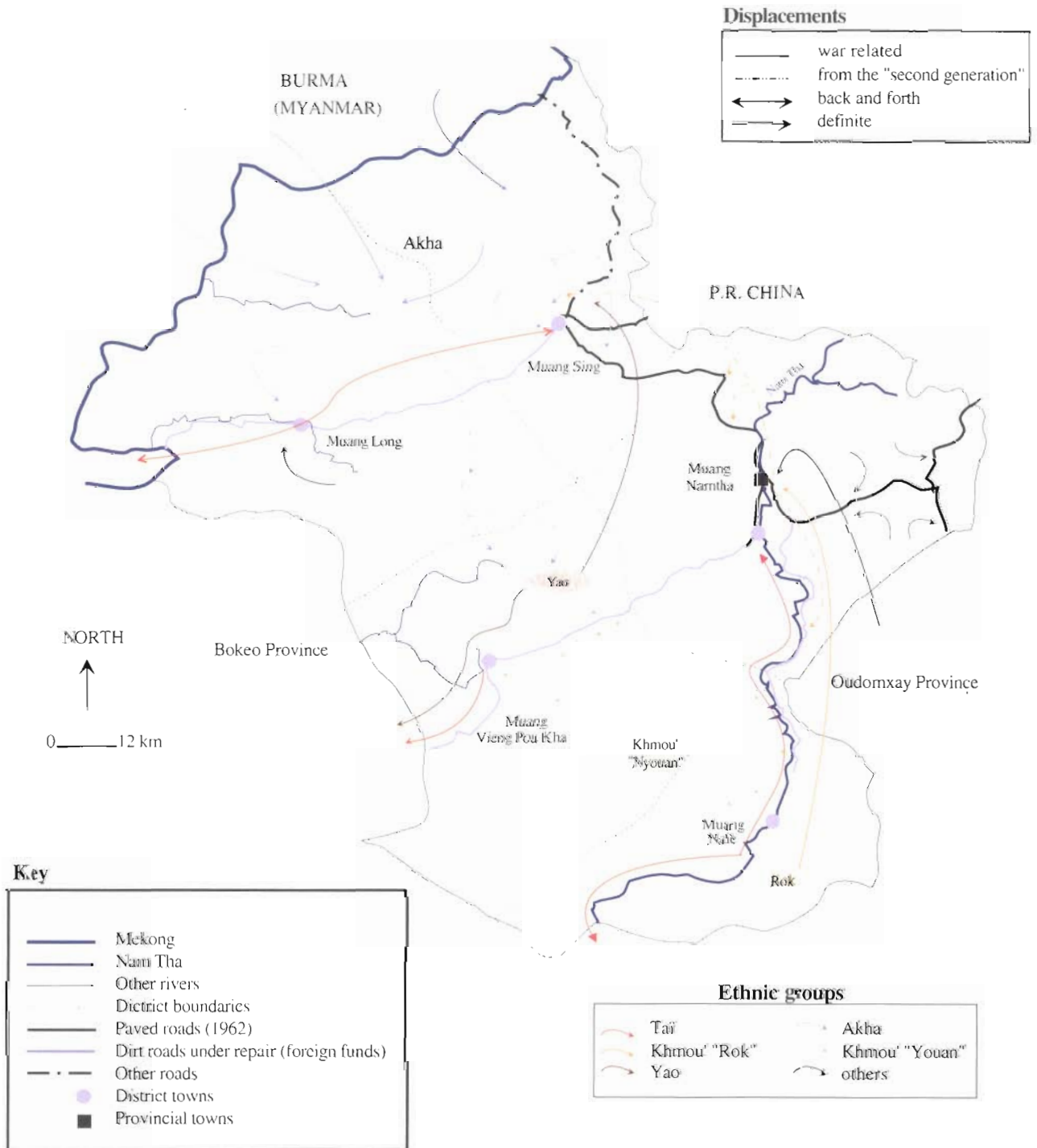
The table that follows attempts to present this first attempt at a typology (see also . The field survey methodology, results and commentary are presented in the second part and seek to show the different effects of relocation in the areas of health and sanitation, agriculture and education in relation to population type and length of time since relocation.

Village Relocations in Luang Namtha Province from 1975 to 1995

Tribe	current region	period	displacement type	number involved
Tai-Lu	Muang Long	1975-1985	displacement due to war	2500-3000
		1985-1996	none	0
	Muang Sing	1975-1985	displacement due to war	?
		1985-1996	left Phongsaly to find new land	around 200 people so far
	Muang Nale	1975-1985	displacement due to war	?
		1985-1996	overspill from overpopulated villages	400
Thai Dam	Muang Namtha	1975-1985	displacement due to war	around 2800
		1985-1995	Family displacements	several dozen families seeking new land
	Muang Long	1975-1985	none	0
		1985-1995	looking for new land from Louang Prabang and Louang Namtha	800
Tai Youan	Namtha	1975-1985	displacement due to war	around 2300
		1985-1996	none	0
Khmou' Youan"	Vieng Pou Kha	1975-1985	displacement imposed by the army	at least 3000
		1985-1996	to combat slash and burn, isolation	at least 1000
Khmou' "Youan"	Muang Nale	1975-1985	displacement imposed by the army	around 2000
		1985-1995	regrouping villages, isolation, site overspill 1975-77	at least 1000
Khmou' Lu	Muang Nale	1975-1985	displacements linked to political integration of certain leaders	at least 400
		1985-1995	same phenomenon	?

Khmou' "Rok"	Muang Nale	1975-1985	movement to lowlands linked with the political integration of leaders, or movement to the highlands due to the return of farmlands	at least 1000
		1985-1995	rural exodus linked to the political integration of leaders	?
Lamet	Muang Nale	1975-1985	few displacements	negligible
		1985-1996	voluntary movement towards the river and services	400
Khouene	Muang Nale	1975-1985	displacements imposed by the army	1000
		1985-1996	Displacements from the first site, 1975-77	?
Akha	Muang Sing	1975-1985	displacements linked to seeking farmland unoccupied land in the lowlands	5500
		1985-1995	adoption of paddy-farming and abandonment of slash and burn	1200
	Muang Long	1975-1985	a) ?	a) 2500
		1985-1975	b) migration from Burma c) migration from Muang Sing d) not stated	b) 7000 c) 2300 ?
	Muang Vieng Pou Kha	1975-1985	no relocations	a dozen villages
		1985-1995	relocations from Muang Long to find new land	0
Yao	Muang Sing	1975-1985	relocations by the army from Vieng Pou Kha	700 personnes
Hmong	Muang Sing	1975-1985	none	0
		1985-1995	voluntary migrations from eastern provinces	2250
	Vieng Pou Kha	1975-1985	relocations for military reasons; exodus towards Thailand and Bokeo	no information
Lahu	Vieng Pou Kha	1975-1985	no information	
		1985-1995	settlement was more or less forced west of Vieng Pou Kha, on account of the need for paddy-farming land	at least 8 villages
	Muang Long	1975-1985	no information	?
		1985-1995	no information	?

Simplified diagram of villages relocations in Luang Namtha province between 1975 and 1996



II. RELOCATION AND ITS IMPACT ON VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

After discussions with the local authorities, we chose three or four villages in three out of the five districts which make up the province. The choice was made according to ethnic and historical criteria, so as to ensure that the population samples represented the various possible types of relocation in the province.

In each settlement, we conducted guided interviews with 30% of the families. Altogether, survey staff visited 147 homes. They filled in the questionnaires prepared in Vientiane with answers collected from each home. The information was then translated into French and put onto a computer. The results of the survey can be read in nine strata: one for each of the districts visited (Muang Sing, Muang Vieng Pou Kha, Muang Nale), and one for each of the ethnic groups involved in the survey (Tai Leu, Hmong, Akha, Khmu Nyouan, Khmu Rok, Khouene).

A/ SOME COMMENTS ABOUT THE VILLAGE STUDIES

1. Muang Nale

Ban Saloi

Khmu Leu village of 52 houses which, with Ban Hatloi on the other bank of the Nam Tha, forms the same administrative unit. 22 families were relocated to Ban Sop Ngim in 1977 and settled in the present site in 1985. The other households originated from a different village, and came directly down to the site in 1989. Most of the families experience a rice shortage for three months of the year.

Ban Poulouang

Khouene village with 31 family units. The former centre of the tasseng, the village was relocated in 1976 during fighting between the guerillas and the revolutionary army. Since that time the inhabitants have relocated twice following unexplained deaths which occurred at the earlier settlements.

Ban Hatnaleng

Mixed Samtao, Khouene and Khmu village with 31 families, Hatnaleng was formed by the merger of five different villages, most of which came down in 1977 during fighting between the counter-revolutionary guerillas and the regular army. Each of these villages stopped at one or two other points before settling at the present site. The village has become a halt for boats plying the river.

Ban Kengkran

This village belongs to the same administrative unit as Ban Hatnaleng. 18 households from five different Khmu Nyouan villages settled here between 1986 and 1989. The villagers came expecting to find land that they could convert into paddy fields. Today they are refusing to resettle at Hatnaleng, despite pressure from the district and very precarious conditions at the present site.

Ban Sop Xim

A Khmu Rok village of 31 families which settled on the border between Nale and Namtha districts in 1983, after the return of the Tai Nyouan forced them to leave the paddy fields they had cultivated at Namtha between 1970 and 1980. Thanks to family ties with people in the provincial administration, the village has a school and a large herd of cattle. The EU has been working in this community for a year.

2. Muang Vieng Pou Kha

Ban Phadeng

Khouene village of 33 families settled close to the district capital since 1985. The inhabitants left their original village in 1973 to cultivate the paddy fields of Yao villagers relocated to Muang Sing. Between 1975 and 1985, the villagers were relocated to the district capital. One third own rice fields. In spite of a large number of school-age children, the village has no school.

Ban Deuennyon

15 families counted under the administration of Ban Phadeng but living some distance away have been settled here since 1986, after staying for a year in a temporary village created as an assembly point. At the same time, other families were sent to Sing and Namtha. Only one family out of the 15 owns a paddy field.

Ban Namvang

43 Hmong families and 42 Kouï families have settled at this high site since 1987, occupying distinct areas. The Hmong were relocated from the south of the district in 1976 and settled in the valley to the west of the present site. 53 people and most of the animals died within three months, after which the villagers decided to return to the mountains. Ban Namvang today has a small spring tap and two husking machines, financed by the villagers themselves. The village has a rice surplus.

Ban Namlouang

A Khmu Nyouan village of 42 families which came to Vieng Pou Kha in 1985 in search of paddy fields and is nowadays settled at the edge of the trail. The villagers left the present site in 1986 - 48 people had died the previous year - to live at a somewhat higher elevation, returning to the same spot in 1994. 16 families possess paddy fields. Trade within the village means that it is self-sufficient. A new school has just been built by the district.

3. Muang Sing

Ban Tchom

Settled in the north of the plain one hour's walk from the district capital, this Khmu village - one of the only ones in the district - is made up of 33 families which arrived at the present site between 1953 and 1996. The majority of them are from Muang Nale, and Phongsaly province. There is a marked difference in status between the recent arrivals and the senior members, the latter, originally from China, possessing 80% of the rice fields. A land dispute has brought the village into conflict with a neighbouring Akha community.

Ban Houeikot

6 km from the Muang Sing market, this Leu village consists of 34 families, most of whom came from Burma (1979) and Phongsaly (1993). The immigrants from Burma were motivated by lack of security, while those from Phongsaly had been suffering from a shortage of land. 11 of the most recent arrivals died during the first year at the new site. The village has been unable to claim the rice fields created by the former inhabitants as these now belong to the neighbouring Akha village. 14 families have no paddy fields. The period of food shortage lasts, on average, four months.

Ban Sophi

38 Akha families live in this village 9 km from the district capital. At the time of the first relocation in 1975, 200 people died in one year (the oldest person in the village is 42). The villagers, who have been at the present site for three years, cultivate paddy fields given to them by the district (25 ha for a population of 179). The village has no school and the food situation is very worrying, as it is reliant on a functioning irrigation system and a high degree of village cohesion.

B/ EFFECTS OF RELOCATION ON HEALTH AND SANITATION

1. High mortality rates following relocation

In most cases, heavy losses of human life occurred during the first year in the new settlement, mostly affecting elderly people and newborn babies. Ban Namvang lost 53 people in one year, Ban Namlouang 48, Ban Houeikot 11, Ban Sophi 200. The results of these deaths were a loss of cultural heritage, and successive relocations as the villagers fled the influence of the bad spirits. In the case of communities where the elders are traditionally the leaders, these losses can undermine social cohesion. Many animals also did not survive relocation, succumbing to various epidemics, which in turn affected the villagers' ability to trade and to develop their new land. It is only after several years at the same site that a village is able to establish a demographic balance. In most cases, therefore, the village will leave the new site after two or three years and, in some instances, will not settle permanently until it has tried three or four different places.

2. Principal aggravating factors

a) Altitude difference between the old and new settlements

The greater the difference in altitude, the higher the death toll during the first relocation (Ban Namlouang, Ban Sophi and Ban Namvang). Only villages which descend progressively from a high altitude can hope to avoid the tragic loss of a large proportion of their population.

b) Water use

On arrival in the plain, the villagers did not find spring water as easily as in the highlands, especially in Muang Sing, so they used water from the nearest river or stream. At the same time they did not systematically boil drinking water, at least at first, even though it was far more important to do so here than at higher altitudes. 33% of all families interviewed did not boil drinking water; in three settlements, this percentage was closer to 90%. In Ban Namvang, after the first failure in the valley, people climbed back up into the hills and built themselves a small spring water tap. With just a little knowledge and money, other villagers could do the same.

c) Health care

The proximity of a hospital, a health centre or a pharmacy is one of the arguments most frequently advanced to encourage villagers to move to the lowlands. Yet if medical practice seems to evolve statistically towards a higher consumption of modern medicines following relocation, this does not necessarily mean that the quality of health care is improving. For the villagers to have better access to modern medicine is one thing, but to use those medicines properly is quite another.

Statistics show that while in 66% of cases the patient will use modern medicine in the first instance, recourse to sacrifice when the medicine fails to cure the malady is greater, at 48%, than prior to relocation (29%). Traditional medicine, on the other hand, appears to fall from favour, being the second choice for treatment only 22% of the time, as opposed to 31% prior to relocation. From the point of view of development, the increased use of modern medicine may seem like a positive step, but it is being made at the cost of traditional knowledge. In all the districts visited, more than in the past, sacrifice is the preferred option when modern medicine fails.

On the other hand, use of hospitals was practically nil in all the villages visited. There appeared to be no exceptions to this rule, which is due partly to the cost of care, partly to the fear of not returning to the village, and partly to a lack of technical means in the hospitals. If medicines bought from a pharmacy or from a hawker don't solve the problem, a villager will initiate a sacrifice rather than go to hospital. As well, few people know how to use the medicines correctly, which are usually sold without instructions in Lao. The

Relocation impact

improvement in health care brought about by the proximity of health centres and pharmacies therefore seems to be illusory.

The provision of health services at the time of relocation appears to be very patchy. Mobile teams sometimes come and vaccinate children, but these operations are often organised by foreign projects (as in Sing and Vieng Pou Kha).

d) Relocation and opium

In some recently resettled villages, the number of opium smokers seems to have risen in the first few years. When sick for a long time, or when confronted with extremely difficult living conditions, people who used to grow opium in their previous villages would increase their opium consumption. In some cases, they would become dependent on other families for their survival. We do not have any accurate statistics, yet one only need observe recent Akha settlements close to Muang Sing to be aware of this problem.

On the other hand, at Ban Namvang, only nine opium smokers, of which only two were younger than 30 were counted. This is in spite of the fact that the village is one of the principal centres for the production of opium in the north of Muang Vieng Pou Kha. According to the village leader, the number of smokers declined when the village returned to a higher altitude after a catastrophic few months spent in the valley.

e) Conclusion

From a health point of view, village relocation has mainly negative consequences in the short and medium term.⁶ Positive effects will not begin to appear until better health services and a planning system which takes greater account of the health of villagers are put in place.

C/ EFFECTS OF RELOCATION ON PRODUCTION AND TRADE PATTERNS

1. A difficult transition to new modes of production

a) From hai to paddy

Most of the recent relocations have been within the framework of the slash and burn eradication policy. New laws or population growth reduce the land available for clearance, fallow periods are shortened, and eventually villagers move out in search of new land. In many cases, however, relocation does not necessarily bring immediate access to paddy land - a circumstance that can provoke bitter disillusionment, as in the case of Ban Kengkran.

Only 11% of villagers interviewed in Luang Namtha owned a paddy field. This figure varies from 2% in Muang Nale to 38% in Muang Sing. Interestingly enough, there were more paddy land owners before relocation than after. Among all the interviewees, 88% had not owned a paddy field before leaving, while 89% do not own one now, with the exception of Muang Sing, where this gap widens from 56% before to 63% after the move. Two factors explain this paradox. On the one hand, those recently settled in Muang Sing often used to own paddy land in their previous villages (Leu people from Phongsaly, Khmu from China). On the other hand, lands allocated by the district are mostly areas which require several years of development and outside technical assistance. In Ban Tchom, for example, Kip 1.5 million was sufficient to develop another 25 ha of fields.⁷

Faced with these difficulties, villagers continue to practice slash and burn as this gives them food security.

⁶ The survey shows significant differences between recent resettlements and villages which have been in place for more than 10 years

⁷ The government issued new land laws in 1991 in order to guarantee land accessibility for ethnic populations who had come down in the previous 10 years and occupied paddy land that the Leu had abandoned during the war. If the former owners come back to their original village, they cannot in theory reclaim their land, and must create new fields.

Now that they are directly under the control of their district administration, the areas cleared each year for slash and burn by the villagers are significantly reduced by comparison with their original villages. If we consider all the families interviewed at Luang Namtha, the average area of land cleared and planted per family per year has declined from 1.25 ha prior to relocation, to 0.98 ha afterwards. The gap varies from district to district. At Nale, for example, where it has not been possible to develop paddy fields, the reduction in area cleared for slash and burn is less than in the other two districts surveyed:

Average	cleared land old village (ha)	cleared land new village (ha)	net rice production old village (tonnes)	net rice production new village (tonnes)	follow period old village (month)	follow period new village (month)
Districts						
Muang Sing	1,15	78,63	1,26	0,66	2,28	2,68
Muang Nale	1,53	1,24	1,242	1,03	2,39	2,69
Vieng Pou Kha	0,8	0,76	0,916	0,75	1,84	3,32

This table shows an overall trend for all districts: cleared land and total dry rice production is dropping. The largest production drop occurred in Muang Sing, since the number of ethnic villagers who used to own paddy land before being relocated is more significant than elsewhere: wet rice production is stagnant, either because villagers have not mastered the skills or because of the lack of working animals, with livestock having succumbed to epidemics, or having been sold prior to departure.⁸ Moreover, villages have not managed to compensate for this production loss with other activities, although in some cases villagers who have learned to fish, or who do so more often, find that it can provide a significant addition to their diet.

b) Increased periods of rice shortage

Consequently, the periods of rice deficit are increasing. A comparison of present to former periods for each district gives the following results:

Follow period (before/after)	equal (no. of families)	longer (no. of families)	shorter (no. of families)	TOTAL
Districts				
Muang Sing	13 (42%)	10 (32%)	8 (26%)	31 (100%)
Muang Nale	22 (50 %)	13 (29,5 %)	9 (30,5 %)	44 (100%)
Vieng Pou Kha	11 (36%)	14 (46%)	5 (18%)	30 (100 %)

Vieng Pou Kha is the district most affected by the increase in the duration of rice deficit, both in relative and absolute terms. The reduction in arable land is not compensated for by a diversification in activities, nor by the gains due to proximity to a transport route, which is not in good enough condition to allow villages to sell their products regularly.

At the same time, there are not necessarily many alternatives to rice, as the relocated communities are not sufficiently integrated into commercial networks (see next paragraph). In fact, these alternatives amount to borrowing from other villagers, the sale of livestock, or the hiring out of labour. As most of the families no longer possess many animals, the cohesion of the community is the most important factor during the period of deficit. If cohesion is weak, then exchanges will become monetarised and/or expensive. The case of the

⁸ 91% of the villagers interviewed at Sing had no buffalo, and 88% had no cows. At Vieng Pou Kha, the corresponding figures

Khmu communities which have suffered a breakdown of their original villages is doubtless one of the most problematic, as these families can no longer count on their traditional trade networks.

In most resettlement sites with heterogeneous populations and/or populations made up of groups which have relocated at different times, senior families tend to monopolise paddy fields, or at least the best situated and most fertile lands. The official argument that villagers relocate to reduce the distance from village to field therefore seems a little specious: in some cases the old fields continue to be cultivated after the relocation, as the new lands are not sufficient to ensure the survival of the family in its new environment.

2. Gradual adaptation towards a commercial network

a) Some villages succeed in taking advantage of their new locations. This was observed in all three districts visited.

From August to September for the last two years, the villages that have resettled on the upper reaches of the Nam Tha sell the wild cardamom they collect in the hills to a Korean company that pays Kip 4,200/husked kg. All the villages visited during the survey were engaged in this commercial activity, although as regulation seems to be nonexistent, one wonders for how much longer the district will be a cardamom producer. Some villages sell medicinal products, mostly plants, but for a tiny price. The traders, however, are making good profits.

Some recently relocated Akha villages in Muang Sing are also taking advantage of their situation. As the plain has now been precisely surveyed and land use is tightly regulated, many villages no longer have access to the species of bamboo used for matting (mai sang, mai bong) and for house construction (mai sot, mai ha). The villagers therefore must buy the mats in the market from others who do have access to the right varieties. Some Akha villages have therefore specialised in the manufacture of mats used to thresh rice, the price of which has nearly doubled in three years.

In Muang Vieng Pou Kha, two villages that we visited have integrated themselves into commercial networks thanks to raising livestock or hunting. The Hmong village of Ban Namvang has succeeded in rebuilding its stock of pigs and cattle since it left the valley. The inhabitants of Ban Poulan, on the other hand, hunt over a wide and mountainous area and sell their game beside the trail. Both of these examples show that it is not necessary to live close to a main road to develop trade. These are exceptional cases, however, as at both Nale and Sing the hunting grounds of new villages are both smaller than in the past, and less abundant. For several villages in Nale, the banks of the Nam Tha back onto the border with Oudomxai province, and the villagers are often faced with extra taxes if they wish to hunt, gather or grow crops on the left bank.

b) Risk of a trade imbalance

For most villages, relocating to the lowlands means at least potentially better access to consumer goods, both edible and manufactured. However, it can happen that families sell off too many assets in order to be able to buy things. At the same time, the meagre earnings from roadside or riverside sales do not cover the expense of relocation. A survey of family indebtedness would provide valuable information about this problem. In most of the villages, recently arrived families were often indebted to senior families on the site. This process directly influences the division of land and helps to entrench the monopoly enjoyed by the longer established households.

c) The opium question

Luang Namtha is no longer the principal opium growing province in Laos, yet the Tibeto-Burman and Miao-Yao minorities continue to cultivate and sell, and sometimes to consume, the sap of the poppy. Relocated villages have a tendency, during the first five years, to produce at least as much as prior to the move. There are several reasons for this phenomenon:

Opium is easy to process and transport and, above all, generates enormous surplus value for the

producers. During the difficult process of adopting new agricultural methods following the move, it makes a practical alternative when rice and other assets are short.

In villages with a high level of cohesion, opium can provide an easy means to develop the village. At Ban Namvang, for example, the two husking machines and the spring tap were financed by the sale of opium. Very few villagers consume the drug themselves. If the reduction of opium production is one of the objectives of the government and international agencies, then the priority in such cases should be to provide those things that villagers currently gain through opium (even if they refuse to resettle beside the road) rather than simply destroying the plants to encourage the cultivation alternative crops that will be far less profitable, at least in the early years.

When the addiction rate is already high in the original village, the health situation at the new site can deteriorate rapidly; epidemics or diseases that were unknown at the previous site lead villagers to smoke to escape their troubles. At the same time, as land use is more strictly regulated in the valley, the villagers will have less land available to cultivate the poppy, which can lead them to reduce fallow times dangerously, and to become more or less dependent on other villages to ensure a supply of opium.

3. Conclusion

Most resettled villages are currently experiencing a period of transition. For villages relocated following the war this transition has been going on for 20 years, with a lack of public assistance causing long-term impoverishment. This kind of village has not seen its standard of living improve, whereas more recently resettled villages, after a difficult first few years, often benefit from foreign aid - as is the case with several Akha villages on the plain of Sing.

In general, relocation seems to bring about a relative concentration of land use and a slow colonisation of new areas. The village economy becomes monetarised and opens itself little by little to the influence of small local markets. In these villages, the traditional sources of cohesion and solidarity provide the key to a successful transition.

D/ EDUCATION AND VILLAGE RELOCATION

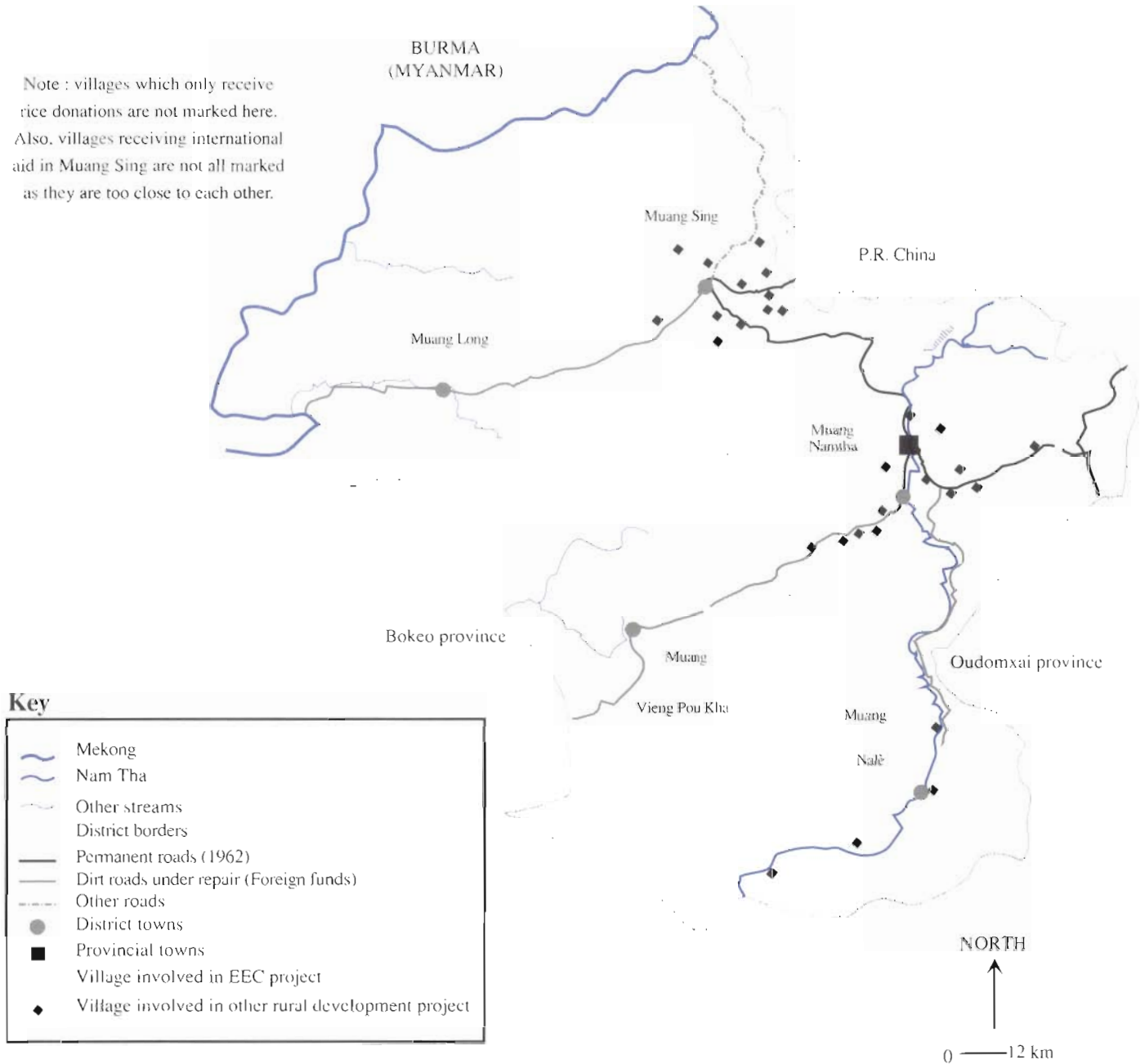
1. Geographic concentration of formal education structures

When in 1983 the province of Houakrong was divided into two new provinces, Bokeo to the south and Luang Namtha to the north, formal education had little structure. Most of the rural schools and military training centres were concentrated in the south-east of Luang Namtha province, an area which had been liberated very early on by the revolutionary army. The communist government then decided to extend primary education in the north of the province (Namtha and Sing districts). Nevertheless the expansion of formal education structures began from administrative centres situated on the plains. This concentration of educational structures still exists today, as shown by the two maps drawn up by the provincial Education Department for Sing and Namtha. In the former district, an effort was initiated in 1975 for the construction of primary schools - there was a total of 47 in 1995, as opposed to 20 in 1975 - but the map shows the weakness of the educational network in the mountains of the north-west, an area inhabited only by minorities. In Luang Namtha, the centralisation of formal education structures is even greater.

This geographic concentration of formal education structures is reinforced by the relocation policy: with the exception of politically important subdistricts, all new schools are constructed in villages which have relocated to the lowlands, as the table below shows.

Map of International Aid, Luang Namtha Province

Note : villages which only receive rice donations are not marked here. Also, villages receiving international aid in Muang Sing are not all marked as they are too close to each other.



New schools built in Sing district

Village name	date of the construction of the school
B. Sai	1985
B. Xiengkeng	1992
B. Bouarkouk kao	1994
B. Bouarnassai	1992
B. Pabat Noi	1994
B. Heula	1992
B. Pabhat	1994
B. Tchom	1994
B. Kiyeu	1994
B. Sophi	1994
B. Oudomxin	1994

Out of 11 settlements, nine are ethnic minority villages recently settled in the plain of Sing. Of these nine villages, eight received assistance in education in 1994 when a German aid program started work in this area. Of these eight villages, some had been relocated in 1977 and therefore had to wait 17 years before receiving any external aid in the area of education, while some Lao Loum villages such as Ban Sai - also a new village - received a new school in 1985 with the aid of public money. As well as being unequally distributed in a geographic sense, public assistance in education also appears to have been ethnically selective as recently as 1985. This observation applies above all to the districts of Sing and Namtha.

In Muang Nale, historical circumstances favoured the early construction of schools in the hilltribe villages on the right bank, and many Khmu villages are now integrated into the system. Nevertheless the same phenomenon of geographic concentration of new facilities, here also 50% supported by German assistance, has been apparent for several years in the north of the district, where a number of villages have been relocated since the beginning of the 1980s.

A similar tendency is observable in Muang Vieng Pou Kha. But while the relocations have generally had no effect on education - the villages have no school, either before or after resettlement - some relocations have had a negative effect, in that some villages have lost schools which they possessed at their previous site, structures built with French or American aid. As well as suffering from a loss of cultural heritage, a breakdown of the community and the reduction of arable land, this category of village has also lost its schools!

2. Low impact on school attendance

In all districts, less than 10% of adolescents had completed their first year of primary education, regardless of sex. Education levels for adults are very low and demonstrate the persistence of sexual inequality in access to education: 46% of the men had never attended school, compared to 62% of women. 11% of men had reached third class of primary school, as against 4% of women. The privileged minority who had completed a primary education accounted for 10% of the men and 5% of the women interviewed.

Relocation does not seem to have had a major impact on the school attendance of children. There is often a greater need for labour compared to the old village, while the relative value of education remains low as the completion of primary school does not seem to bring benefits equal to the outlay. Even when the village has a school, children almost never leave the village for further study.

3. Better knowledge of the Lao language

While integration into formal education structures remains weak, people's oral command of the Lao language seemed to be improving in all villages visited, with the exception of Ban Sophi. Whether as a language of trade between villages or as the language of commerce in the local market, Lao is gradually becoming an indispensable tool for integration into the new environment. From this point of view, and if we set aside the question of loss of cultural heritage, relocation has had a positive effect on the linguistic integration of the ethnic minorities. It can also help children to adjust better to education structures, as long as these structures are set up soon after the move, and as long as the state takes steps to integrate children into the second cycle of education.

Given the motivation of villagers to send their children to school, it seems to us that relocation usually has a positive aspect in the area of education, which is lacking in the areas of health and economics.

E/ CONCLUSION

Regarding the impact of relocation on ethnic minority settlements, we must take into account three essential elements:

The health situation in most of the affected villages is disturbing, and is usually worse than in the village of origin.

Stabilisation of the village economy remains uncertain, and the degree of solidarity within the community is without doubt the most important factor during this period of adjustment to new methods of production and trade.

Better access to education, at least in the medium term, seems to be the main positive consequence of relocation.

The problems encountered by the villagers in the areas visited show, furthermore, that external aid, either from the government or foreign sources, is almost never extended to villages prior to relocation. Two reasons may explain this fact:

The government does not plan for such aid, which would suggest a certain cynicism among the leaders, most of whom are well aware of the difficulties encountered by the villagers. This kind of thinking no doubt prevailed at the end of the war but seems to be less present nowadays.

The financial means are not available. In this case it is necessary to consider how such aid may eventually be made available. An analysis of Lao policy and of the results of the first foreign aid programs should point the way for such a consideration.

III. INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS AND INTERNATIONAL AID

The aim of this chapter is to show how international aid is directly related to the issue of village relocation, to provide decision makers with information about the objectives and requirements of provincial leaders, and to introduce some thoughts about Non Formal Education and possible actions in this field.

A/ INTERNATIONAL AID AND ITS ROLE VIS-A-VIS VILLAGE RELOCATION

1. International aid in Luang Namtha: Quantitative data

Luang Namtha is one of the most favoured provinces in terms of donations, investment and foreign aid. German Cooperation (GTZ), the non-government organisations ZOA, World Concern, Action Internationale Contre la Faim (AICF), Ecoles Sans Frontieres (ESF) and Enfants et Developpement (EED), as well as the EU and the World Wildlife Conservation Fund (WWCF), have all specialised in community development. Their combined budget for 1994-2000 amounts to roughly \$25 million.

The World Bank, using Asian Development Bank funds, is involved in infrastructure construction, adopting a repayment plan over 40 years, commencing from the completion of the work. The total loan, which includes salaries, amounts to \$9.6 million for 1994-2000.

Altogether, Western aid, either as grants or loans, amounts to about \$35 million for provincial development. This sum is spread out over six years, at an average of \$5.7 million per year.

2. Geographical distribution of aid

Map 5 clearly shows how aid is organised in the province. Of the 45 villages shown,⁹38 (86%) are situated along trails, roads or riversides, and have been relocated in the last 20 years. Non-Tai minorities live in 33 villages. Several projects, each with a different focus, may work within the one village. Villages are generally chosen following provincial recommendations.¹⁰

It is clear from all this that international aid has become involved in the government's relocation policy, at least in the two districts of Sing and Namtha, which are serviced by a good road. This is simply an observation of an objective fact, and is not intended as a judgment about the intentions of those concerned.

There are some exceptions to this in the other districts, notably in Vieng Pou Kha where the EU has chosen to work with Hmong, Akha and Khoui villages in the mountains. GTZ is also working in non-relocated villages, financing schools and developing rice banks. In Muang Nale, on the other hand, all the villages in which GTZ has projects are settled beside the river, and many are new Khmu Nyouan or Khmu Leu settlements which have in some cases been relocated several times since 1975.

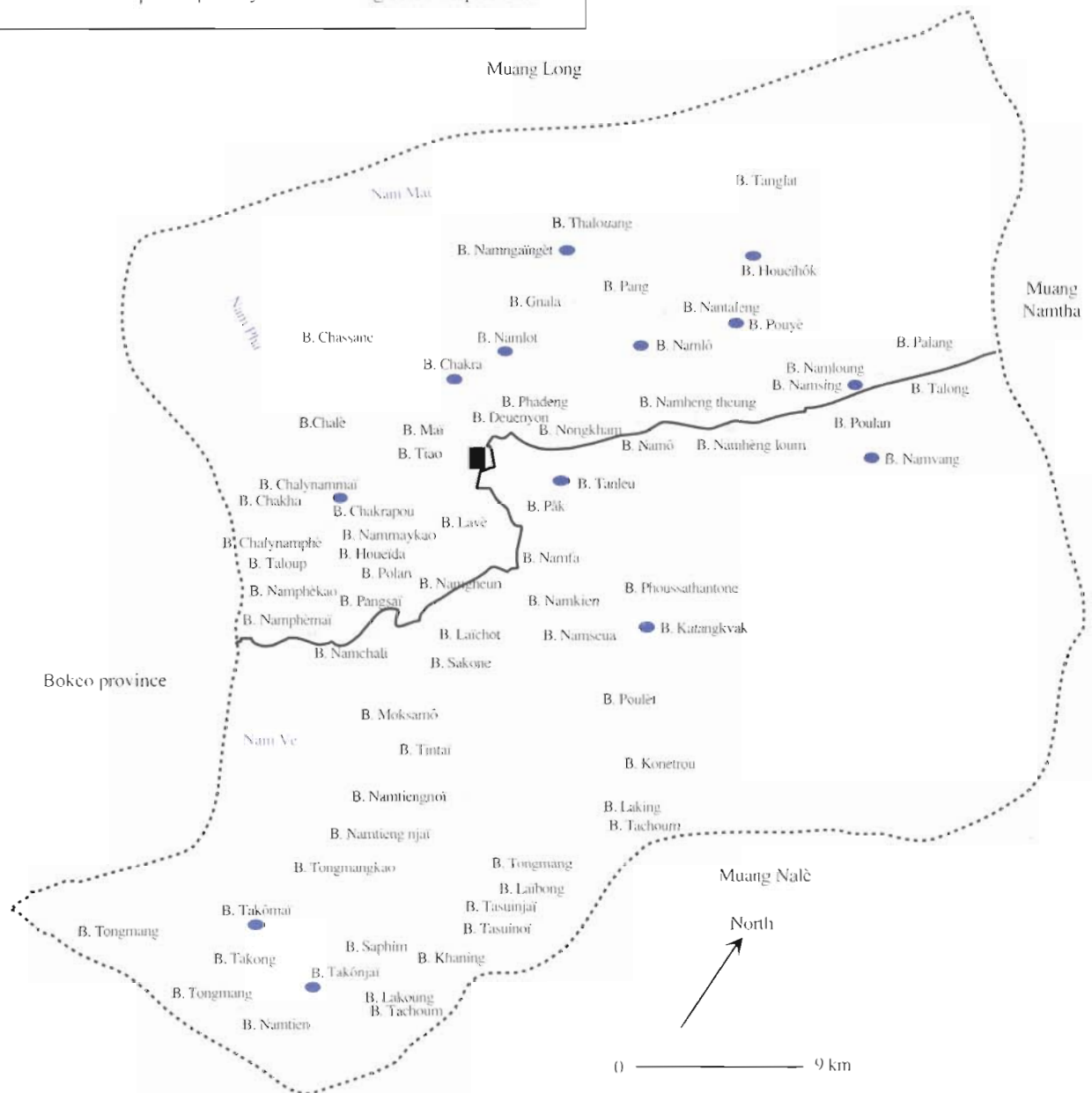
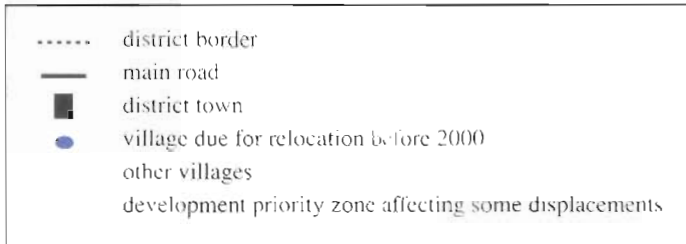
At the same time, international aid is also helping to upgrade the road network in Long, Vieng Pou Kha and Nale districts. In most cases the relocation of nearby villages to the roadside has already begun.

⁹ The real number is somewhat higher, but for reasons of presentation, some settlements in Muang Sing could not be shown, as they are very close to one another. These villages are situated east of the district capital, inside the V formed by the road to the Chinese border.

¹⁰ Looking at the maps of the Namtha administration, it is interesting to note that the number of villages shown is far smaller than the real number. The omissions are all villages which have remained at their original site, in the mountains. Does a village only begin to exist when it moves to the lowlands?!

Expected Relocations in Vieng Pou Kha, 1995-2000

Key



B/ PRESENT OFFICIAL POLICY AND PLANS, 1996-2000

1. Current government attitude towards relocation

a) Policy

Most provincial leaders involved in rural development are fond of repeating that relocations nowadays take place on a voluntary basis as people seek access to services and “new jobs”, that is, work in paddy fields. Thus, officially, it is the villagers who appeal to the government for new land. Provincial officials declare that they are no longer in a position to satisfy every demand, since there is not much land left near the main roads. The government therefore wishes to create priority development zones, or focal zones, in each district, where people from various villages can be grouped later. These focal zones are in the process of being identified and the villages involved have not yet been moved. These focal zones consist generally of small valleys, large enough to allow paddy field development. They are not yet traversed by trails, but will probably influence road network building in the future. As these projects are not yet under way, we do not have a complete list of focal zones. Maps 6 and 7 show the location of two of them, while the document provided by the administration of Muang Sing goes into detail in the Lao language about the characteristics of future focal zones in the district.

b) Actions

Projected relocations from now until 2000 can be found at the end of part I supra. They give rise to three observations:

Relocations concern mainly small villages with fewer than 20 houses, the minimum for a settlement to be officially considered a village. For example, in Muang Nale, nearly all the villages listed are on the right bank and make up the final remnant of the population which has largely been relocated since 1975. In other cases, the size of the village is not a factor motivating the relocation. Ban Namvang, one of the villages which participated in the survey, is also one of those listed for relocation to Vieng Pou Kha, doubtless in an effort to curb its opium output, regardless of the villagers’ wish to remain in the mountains and in spite of the fact that the EU has already begun to work in this village. In other cases, such as Lahu and Akha villages in the west of the district, it is simply a means of steering the village economy towards sedentary agriculture.

It also seems that villages will be removed and reunited according to their ethnic origin, doubtless to make the transition in agricultural methods easier by bringing traditional skills to bear.

Except for Muang Namtha, where some 20 villages are still about to move, district authorities seem to be applying more caution than formerly. They wait for construction of the new settlement to begin before asking the villagers to move. This has been the case at Vieng Pou Kha, where the government temporarily refused permission for some Khmu villages to settle beside the trail.

In the resettled villages, the government wishes to encourage regional specialisation according to the traditional skills of each ethnic group. In this way it hopes both to limit slash and burn,¹¹ and to integrate villages in a regional economy with enterprises such as market gardening, plantations of rare timber, and cattle. Although province officials are still talking about extremely ambitious targets in the current Five Year Plan (elimination of slash and burn, 80% literacy, etc), they are nevertheless very conscious both of the difficulties in the field, concerning mainly health and economics, and of the long term risks of such plans.

One successful relocation, Ban Hatnjao, was examined at a Rural Development Committee meeting. It is a small Hmong settlement situated a few kilometres away from the district capital, specialising in the production of pineapples which the villagers sell at a sizeable profit in the Luang Namtha market. “But we realise,” say the officials, “that if the number of such villages increases in the next few years, other problems will arise. How to dispose of so much merchandise in such a small market? How to export the produce with roads that are unusable for part of the year? If overall demand does not increase, how can prices be prevented from collapsing in the medium term? How can we ensure that enough development funds are available for the communities, and that interest rates will remain as low as possible?”

¹¹ According to statistics provided by the government, Luang Namtha has 6,770 ha of paddy fields and 13,000 ha cultivated by slash and burn.

Expected Relocations in Nalé district, 1996-2000

Note : map drawn from education service map, 1991 and completed with observations in the field

Key

- district border
- district town
- villages due for relocations, 1996-2000
- other villages
- Focal zone



2. Possible advantages for concerned populations

a) A necessary cooperation

As the process affecting most of the ethnic minority people of the province seems irreversible and, in fact, not very different from situations in other South-East Asian countries, it is less important to show the negative aspects, which are fairly well known to most development workers, than to offer guidance and help the government make good decisions at the right time.¹² If international aid is unable to oppose village relocation then it should, in the interest of the villagers, anticipate it. It is better to plan actions with the cooperation of the government than not to act until after the villagers have moved out. While working in Luang Namtha province over the last few months, we realised that local government services were not trying in any way to hide planned actions concerning relocation. On the contrary, they wished to keep international aid officials briefed.

The results of the survey carried out in 12 provincial settlements points clearly to the fact that the five years following relocation are the most crucial, during which time health and economic problems are the most pressing. Outside assistance should therefore start at least two years prior to relocation, and continue for at least three years afterwards. As the edges of the roads and rivers were and continue to be the main destinations for relocated villages, it makes sense to help the administration develop these sites before new populations arrive to settle there. In this regard, it seems to us incredible that when, for example, a new road is built with international assistance, the construction of health centres and amenities for potable water are not included in the budget.

Moreover, relocations within the province in the short term hinge on the development of the focal zones. It makes sense to identify these precisely and to develop them as quickly as possible in accordance with the wishes and traditional knowledge of their future inhabitants.

b) Development does not necessarily mean relocation

It may be worthwhile trying to convince Lao decision makers that successful development does not necessarily mean relocating villages in valleys or plains. In several instances, living conditions in an old village situated in the mountains were far better than those experienced after the village had moved, even 10 years after relocation. Cattle rearing is also more feasible at altitude than in the valleys.

In some cases, it would make sense to find out early on if any agricultural specialisations and health and education services can be brought to a village even when it lies far from any transport route. Many villagers would prefer to do the work to upgrade a path which they use every day, than relocate without being sure that any aid will be forthcoming once they have resettled.

In this connection, the most important thing is to change the thinking of provincial bureaucrats. One way to achieve this might be to divide foreign aid into two categories and apportion it using a quota system. One category would be for villages that have already been relocated. The other would be for villages which do not wish to move and which have a promising capacity for development, as well as sufficient community cohesion to contribute, through their own labour, to the transport of the necessary materials. Such actions might take longer to carry out and cost more money, but from a social point of view the results would be far better. Lao officials themselves are fond of pointing out that good development does not proceed too quickly, and that the social aspect of development is one of the priorities of the central government.

c) Estimation of financial requirements

We asked the Muang Namtha administration to estimate the type and cost of actions they think necessary for future relocated settlements. They produced a document of which the following is a translation:

¹² Some Western countries have also used relocation in the past as a method of developing their lands. The current policy appears to us to be far less pernicious than many people seem to think. Fundamentally it concerns a problem of development whose complexity should be grasped before any judgment is passed.

Type of action	Cost (millions of kips spent over 3 a 5 ans)
transporting population	33,46
building medecine stocks	5,693
aid for house construction	52,96
Financial aid for planning rice fields	172,942
irrigation	125,632
school construction	247
rice donations for follow periods over initial years	36,224
access road, construcyion to end village isolation	82,634
wells, tapping watersources	47,26
advance planning of site	97,946
TOTAL	902,752

We are not in a position to comment on these figures because the survey did not cover Muang Namtha, but it seems to provide a good basis for reflection on future plans.

3. Requirements for training and Non Formal Education

a) Needs as expressed by the province

During a recent speech, the Vice-Governor of Luang Namtha explained how he envisions education developing in the province. The following is a paraphrase of the speech:

Slow development is necessary for the sake of the social wellbeing of the province's inhabitants. Education for all is essential to such a policy. The province seeks to achieve central government goals for the year 2000, with literacy reaching 80% and 50% of the school age population finishing secondary school (matthanyom).

It is therefore necessary to build schools in the lowlands but also in the mountains, in order to teach the villagers the Lao language. Village heads must receive training to improve their capacity to develop their villages. During 1997, 105 village heads will receive training. 1,000 village agricultural technicians will also receive training before being dispatched to focal zones. Only this kind of effort will help to reduce the cultural differences between the various ethnic groups of the province. The promotion of traditional medicine must also be an important focus of activity. In all cases, the relocation of a village to a focal zone should be the product of a discussion with all of the inhabitants and an analysis of their traditional knowledge.

At the provincial level, professional training of cadres is one of the essential elements. The province also wishes to develop educational exchanges with other provinces, or with neighbouring countries, so that civil servants can master new technologies.

Although the themes raised in this speech were too general to form a basis for actual planning, they seem to provide a good framework for reflection for leaders in Non Formal Education at the central level. It remains now to elaborate this framework in the light of an analysis of the survey results from 12 villages of the province.

b) Needs expressed by the villagers

Two Non Formal Education (NFE) centres have been set up in Namtha and Sing districts, while a total of seven villages benefit from a Non Formal Education centre run by a volunteer in each village. Since the

villages taking part in NFE programs were already well known to us, the provincial Education Department asked that we conduct our surveys in other villages. As a result were working under rather unusual conditions, as none of the villagers we interviewed had a basis on which to answer our questions. None of them had yet been inside either of the two provincial centres. In cases where the settlement was close to the district capital, people would explain that they did not dare enter the building as they felt undereducated or not well enough dressed.

In total, we interviewed 143 heads of families, but only 122 could answer one or more of the following questions:

What do you expect from the NFE centre regarding handicrafts?

What do you expect from the NFE centre regarding agriculture?

What do you expect from the NFE centre regarding health care?

Statistical results of enquiry into new villages needs in non formal education

Demand	Number (statistical frequency)
1/ Husbandry skills	39
2/ Irrigation	4
3/ Crop plantations	9
Agriculture Total	52 (100%
4/ Clear water	21
5/ Health	19
6/ Vaccination	5
7/ Health education (notices, diagrams)	3
Health Total	48 (100%)
8/ Advisors	6
9/ Weaving	9
10/ useful products (sheets, mattresses, machetes)	4
11/ mechanics	2
Crafts Total	21(100%)
TOTAL	122

Regarding agriculture, nearly every villager wished for assistance with rearing cattle. Many had lost most of their animals during relocation, and could not trade much in the market or in other villages. Some were interested in growing commercial crops, such as teak plantations. In this case a medium-term investment would be necessary, accompanied by training in horticulture.

In the area of health, the two most frequent requests were for a drinking water system (gravity fed system, well or spring) and the permanent presence of a paramedic to vaccinate animals or to teach villagers some basic facts about the human body.

Finally, with regard to handicrafts, the presence of advisers would be appreciated, as would the setting up of a network for the sale of basketry. (Most of the villages visited were Khmu.)

It must be made clear that, when villagers talk about plantations, irrigation or drinking water, they expect technical assistance, not just training without material support. We believe that to meet these needs, a precise study of the possibility of partial self-financing combined with the permanent presence of a provincial or foreign technician would allow for the transfer of basic knowledge without the need for a large budget. In some of the villages visited, people had already built a system for the delivery of water, but unfortunately the water remained non-potable owing to a lack of skills and means.

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