

Rural Community Development in Northeast Thailand: Training Graduate Volunteers in Market Development

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The project has two objectives: to strengthen the institutional capability of Ramkhamhaeng University to deliver programs in rural areas that have relevance to locally-defined goals and objectives; and to foster knowledge and understanding within Athabasca University concerning Thailand, its development priorities and possible opportunities for future co-operation.

To achieve these goals, Athabasca University and Ramkhamhaeng University have requested \$491,062 from CIDA. Planning and developing the proposal was made possible in part by a CIDA planning mission grant of \$9,295. In addition, the two universities, partly with the support of the Government of Alberta, have invested close to \$100,000 in developing the project, and intend to contribute an additional \$175,747 in cash and in kind in support of the full project, representing 26 per cent of the total project cost of \$666,809.

Ramkhamhaeng and Athabasca are leading open universities dedicated to the extension of access to a university education to those who do not have that opportunity, thereby contributing to the development of their respective nations. The proposed project focuses on the impoverished northeast region of Thailand, and intends to create out of two problems—the lack of markets for craft and agricultural items produced by villagers, especially women, and a lack of employment opportunities for Ramkhamhaeng graduates residing in this region—an opportunity both to capitalize on the existing strengths of both institutions in delivering programs to outlying areas, and to expand Ramkhamhaeng's capability in this regard. Building on existing models that have proven effective, Ramkhamhaeng University will develop a curriculum, learning materials, and delivery, management and evaluation systems that provide training to qualified Ramkhamhaeng graduates, enabling them to work effectively with villagers to develop markets from their produce. Athabasca University will assist with contributions of expertise both in curriculum development, especially in the marketing area, and in project evaluation, both formative and summative. Athabasca University will also organize a seminar on project evaluation to which will be invited the senior Thai personnel involved in the project, and Canadian personnel working on other projects in Thailand funded by CIDA under the ILP.

The project aims to provide three months of intensive training in rural development, with an emphasis on marketing, to 40 trainees at two centres in the northeast, 20 at Roi Et and 20 at Udon Thani, followed by eight months of fieldwork in villages throughout the two provinces. Special efforts will be made to recruit women trainees, an objective particularly appropriate in this case since approximately 75 per cent of the ultimate beneficiaries of the project will be village women. Local business leaders and others influential in the region will be involved in the project as members of Local Advisory Boards, one Board attached to each centre. Their role will be to support the project in moral, political, and financial teams, and to serve as mentors to the project trainees and advisors to the project staff.

The project began on April 1, 1988 and be completed by March 31, 1991. At the completion of the project, there should be significant improvements in the marketing capabilities of the targeted villages, a curriculum and study materials that can be used at Ramkhamhaeng and elsewhere, specific data on the villages used as field sites and on the comparative effectiveness of the program as delivered in two different centres, and, finally, a clear demonstration of how universities can play a leadership role in coordinating the efforts of a number of agencies and individuals in furthering goals of national development.

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