

ABSTRACT

CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES ON LIVELIHOOD OF THE ELDERLY IN NORTHEASTERN THAI VILLAGES*

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This is a study of how the elderly in two villages in Nang Rong district, Burirum perceived the process of social change and implementation of development programmes in relations to their livelihood. The inquiry aimed at answering three questions : what was the livelihood like in the old days when these elderly were still young? ; how has the rural society changed and what were the major development programmes introduced? ; and whether and how these changes affect the livelihood of the elderly?

The study employed a focus group discussion method in acquiring information for analysis. The sample villages were selected on the basis of the extent to which development projects were introduced. The team chose one village which is included in the PDA-CIDA Community-based

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Integrated Rural Development Programme (CBIRD) while the other village is not. Two groups of old villagers (aged 60 and over) were selected according to the economic status, one group included well-to-do elderly and the other were poor elderly. Each group consisted of 7-8 elderly in addition to one researcher as the moderator and a research assistant as a note-taker.

It was revealed that the elderly in general viewed life in the past (when they were young) as simple and less dependent on the outside world. There was no development projects. The only development activities were those locally initiated and everyone, young or old, was always activity involved.

The elderly had a rather negative feeling towards social change, for example, much of the social status and roles of the elderly were undermined, the livelihood has increasingly becoming dependent on the economic conditions outside the villages, the population increase added to the pressure on both agricultural and residential land. In terms of development programmes, the elderly saw that several programmes, e.g., health services and communication improvement, had some benefits that they could enjoy. Some programmes helped increase earnings for their children which meant the elderly could share some benefits indirectly. However, in their opinion, none of the development programmes were designed to directly and substantially benefit them. In addition, the process of development now excluded the elderly in participation. In the past, the elderly were always part of the community decision, actions, recognition and accomplishment. At the present, emphasis and authority were placed instead in the formal legal institutions with outside base such as the village committee, the village headman, and the youth group. It was found

from the discussions that the economic status of the elderly could affect the consequences of social change and development programmes on the livelihood of the elderly. For instance, the well-to-do elderly were able to draw more benefits from the changes and could have taken part in the process of development more than the poor elderly.

The authors recommend that a further research is required in order to identify specific needs of the elderly, ways in which the elderly could be included in the development process and how to design a programmes which will directly benefit the quality of life of the rural elderly.