



สถาบันวิจัยและพัฒนา

A STUDY OF KAREN STUDENT MOBILITY TO NORTHERN THAI CITIES:

Directions, Problems, Suggested Courses of Action

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Introductory Remarks

This research report grew out of the conviction by members of the Thai-Norwegian Church Aid Highland Development Project that the movement of Karen students to cities in northern Thailand in recent years was creating problems in terms of not channeling sufficient Karen expertise back to the Karen villages in the hills. As a result, an agreement was made that the Payap University Research Center would, between September and December, 1986, study this movement and make suggestions with regards to it. This report includes our findings, an analysis of the situation regarding these Karen movers, and a number of proposals regarding this mobility.

At first, we held the rather simplistic view that our purpose was simply to find a way to inspire Karens to return home. After studying the problem for some time, we found, as is so often the case, the the problem ran much deeper than we had at first anticipated. We found, for example, that some of the best known, most enterprising, and thoroughly respectable Karens in the cities had come from the hills but had not returned home. If we were to suggest that this was a mistake or that all Karens should go back where they came from, we would be putting ourselves in an indefensible position. We could not simply propose means for getting the Karens we studied to return to their home villages.

Further examination of the problem found that pride in being Karen was a major factor in making the non-return of Karens to the hills a problem. We found, as the leaders of TN-HDP had implicitly sensed when asking us to carry out this project, that many of the Karen stayers in the cities were facing identity crises, not knowing whethr they were Karens, Thais, something in between, or even what

being Karen or Thai meant. We thereupon retroactively added an assessment of pride in being Karen as one of the purposes of this study. The open-ended nature of the questionnaires facilitated this late change by providing considerable room within the individual answers for this kind of analysis.

As a result, many of the proposals we make do not deal directly with population mobility. We suggest, instead, means by which the Karens who come to the city for the purpose of obtaining a higher education, can contribute to bettering Karen life. Through this process, we are confident that Karens will adopt a better attitude towards their own ethnicity and that this will lead, in addition to the various development projects and initiatives, to upgrading Karen life in the hills. Only by effecting this change in attitude will Karens who live in the city see advantages to living in the hills. The availability of good-paying jobs that utilize the education which these Karens have received in city schools and which use to advantage Karen hill experience will of course accelerate this process, but we also see a need for a change of attitude and the improvement of Karen morale.

Following the submission of this report to the Thai-Norwegian Church Aid Highland Development Project, a seminar will be held with educated Karens, Karen elders, and a number of others knowledgeable on Karen affairs. We will present our findings and make suggestions based on our analysis for the purpose of eliciting feedback from these experts. At that time, we will perhaps rework our analysis and make new suggestions to TN-HDP. We hope that this will be the most efficient means for making meaningful proposals to the Project and for

helping the Karens under study and who have been so patient with all members of the research team. To all of them, we owe a large debt of gratitude which we hope this report can help to repay.

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