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MIRI - BINTULU REGIONAL PLANNING STUDY

ASSOCIATION PAPER

THE HUMAN FACTOR IN DEVELOPMENT

An Interim Report for
Discussion with the
Steering Committee

— JANUARY 1973 —

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THE HUMAN FACTOR IN DEVELOPMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 This paper presents some of the findings of the Study's sociologists. The conditions referred to are primarily those observed at the Lambir rubber planting scheme located in the Study Area, but information relating to other schemes is also included.

1.2 The approach to problems of land development is chiefly through the reactions and point of view of those directly involved and the concern here is with response of settlers and their families, as individuals and members of different ethnic groups, to the incentives, difficulties and opportunities arising from settlement scheme development.

1.3 The criticisms and suggestions contained in this paper are therefore formulated primarily from this viewpoint. Although there has been frequent and current interchange between the sociological team and the agricultural planners of the Study, it still remains to bring the findings of these two groups together in a set of more elaborate recommendations. In this connection reference is made to the working paper on 'Alternative Strategies for Rural Development'.

1.4 However, it is considered preferable at this stage to present to the Steering Committee this paper in order to stimulate consideration within the relevant Government units, as well as dialogue between the Government and the Consultants.

2. Background and Objectives

2.1 Basic to any consideration of land development policy are questions of human potential and need. Among these are questions of what type of person is likely to participate in land development programmes; who should be encouraged to do so; what are these persons likely to want once they become participants; and how are their demands likely to conflict with other development goals. Answers to these questions are clearly important to the design of recruitment programmes and forms of settlement organization that will meet both individual needs and long-term development objectives.

New villages pose a greater problem of adjustment to some groups than to others, and, in general, the greatest demands are made of Iban and other longhouse people. To these groups, the scheme not only presents new physical surroundings and patterns of settlement but also an unfamiliar routine of work, leisure and new problems of budgeting and consumption. While most Iban prefer to live in longhouses, these are not always provided, and for families required to live in individual dwellings, the problems of adjustment are likely to be even greater. Indeed, some effects of single family dwelling, such as a breakdown of inter-family contacts and community constraints on social behaviour, may be socially undesirable. Many Iban settlers report that because they can no longer work together on the veranda, or in their fields, they feel less inclined to work and may remain at home, rather than go to their lots, because their actions are unlikely to provoke adverse comment; others are not apt to see them and, if they do, community opinion is no longer so important. On the other hand, settlers who live in longhouses appear to be no more conservative economically than those who live in single-family dwellings. In the future, therefore, consideration might be given to the construction of short longhouses of five or six doors with provision for possible future extension. The leaders of these longhouses might be included in the organisational set-up of the scheme and, as such, could provide an important link between settlers and management.

At the present time individual Iban families, whether they live in a longhouse or not, recognize a community leader (tuai rumah) who deals with minor offenses, settles disputes among his followers and, in general, performs essentially the same role as a traditional longhouse headman. The scheme, as yet, provides no institutionalized alternative. However, the role of the tuai rumah is not clearly defined in the scheme set-up particularly in relation to the management. While this is also true of the headman of Malay settlement communities, it is less serious as the Malay have greater experience with hierarchical political relations above the village level than the Iban do and, in general, feel less estranged from the management.

In mixed villages made up of settlers from different ethnic groups, the members of each group tend to sort themselves out into separate communities and the only multi-ethnic organisations are those, like village councils or school committees, initiated from the outside that have a membership restricted to group leaders. While there is some visiting between families on Hari Raya or Gawai Dayak and settlers meet at work, while shopping, or in the scheme office, there are few close voluntary ties between families of different groups, and the great majority of settlers prefer to live in their own community. This does not mean that mixed settlements are a failure or are undesirable. Inter-group relations are generally harmonious and are likely to improve still further as members of different groups gain a better understanding of one another. Integrated schemes, in short, are feasible, if 'integration' is understood in the relatively restricted sense used here.

At the moment the division between settlers and management is great and needs to be bridged. This can be done in a number of ways, by giving greater recognition to existing community leaders, delegating increased responsibility to settler organisations - particularly in matters relating to community affairs -, recruiting settlers and their children into management and staff positions, etc. These possibilities are discussed later on in connection with the closely related problems of social adjustment and settler development.

3.2 Income Levels

Income creation is crucial to the success of a scheme, and in planning, careful attention must be given to selecting crops, deciding on holding size or shares, providing market or processing facilities, etc., so that settlers are assured of a relatively high level of income. On existing rubber schemes inadequate income is a major source of settler dissatisfaction.

Experience with rubber also reveals the economic hazards of total reliance on a single crop, without subsidiary activities or sources of employment, on or off the scheme, for settlers or their dependants. Incorporation of wet-rice holdings in existing schemes may be partial answer, and where possible such holdings might be increased to allow still further diversification and encourage more initiative in the selection of crops, etc. Experience at Lambir suggests that in order to encourage permanent cropping and avoid conflict such land should be available on a long-term basis and surveyed and subdivided before being turned over to settlers. Once allotment are assigned, settlers' rights should be clearly defined and safeguarded to prevent misunderstanding. In addition, the labour available per family may be greater than is assumed, and varies widely from one household to another, so that larger holdings or greater flexibility in holding size may be desirable to prevent underemployment and increase incomes. It might be desirable to increase holding size over time, reducing the number of settlers per scheme, by encouraging unsuccessful settlers to drop out and increasing the holdings of those who are more successful. At Lambir active tappers whose trees have reached maturity, work an average of only 13 days per month, 6 hours per day, suggesting some under-employment of labour even at a rate of one tapper per family, whereas the average number of adults capable of employment per family is 2.5 persons.

Another serious problem is income distribution over time. On existing rubber schemes, a family receives a \$40 per month subsistence allowance debited to its loan account until its trees reach maturity and begin to produce. This amount is insufficient to maintain a household at a reasonable level of productivity and is a serious disincentive to migration. Particularly this is true of just those persons, young couples with small children, who are the most desirable settlers; under present circumstances, young settlers may be forced to sacrifice educational opportunities for their children, if they join a scheme, simply to make ends meet. This problem is a serious one, and most settlers report that low incomes and the absence of meaningful work during the period that immediately follows their settlement on a scheme is a highly discouraging experience. Moreover, it lays the basis for a later pattern of labour instability and possible non-residence.

A third problem arises in connection with indebtedness and loan repayment. Monthly average incomes from rubber tapping for Phase I holdings at Skrang Land Development Scheme are between \$50 and \$60 (Tawi P, 1972). At Lambir they are roughly \$75 for fully producing lots. The average loan debt on both schemes is over \$6,000 per settler. While incomes are increasing slightly, they are still relatively low given this scale of indebtedness. In addition, loans are subject to 7.5 per cent interest compounded annually. This brings average debts, minimally, to over \$8,000. Given the present terms of repayment - 10 per cent of rubber incomes - such debts can never be repayed by most settlers. Besides creating permanent indebtedness, repayment deductions are likely to depress incomes still further and make it impossible for most settlers to realise an immediate improvement in income upon moving onto a scheme. Moreover, settlers are likely to discover that with deductions the amount they are paid for their rubber is less than that received by independent farmers, and, as a result, they may feel victimised or seek outside buyers.

In this connection there is also a serious information problem, and many settlers, particularly Iban at Lambir, are unaware of the fact that their house and subsistence allowance are debited to their loan or, if they know this, doubt that they will be asked for full repayment.

Finally, on ethnically mixed schemes, like Lambir, there are significant differences in income between ethnic groups. For most Malay settlers rubber is tapped by the wife or other dependants as a supplement to the family's main earnings which come from casual or permanent wage employment off the scheme. Few Iban, by comparison, have access to outside employment with the result that the economic position of the two groups is very different. Chinese settlers, who generally have the clearest understanding of the economic terms of scheme entry, are likely to feel that their holdings are hopelessly indebted and insecure. Like Malay settlers, they therefore often turn to outside employment, if they remain on the scheme at all.

3.3 Services

The availability of social, health and educational services is a major incentive for joining a scheme and these facilities are heavily used. Special consideration should therefore be given to the spatial concentration of schemes, as was planned in the original formulation of Rubber Planting Scheme 'B', so that they can sustain secondary schools, permanent clinics, and so on, - in short, provide an even higher level of service facilities than now exists. In this way, land development programmes can contribute to eliminating disparities between urban and rural life.

In general, settlers appreciate what has been done for them in this regard and point to primary schools, maternity clinics, piped water, visiting medical teams, and so on as features of settlement life they like best. Improvements, of course, are possible and two features of settlement life are sources of widespread dissatisfaction: cooperative stores and housing. Regarding the first, it may be preferable to open schemes to licenced privately-owned shophouses, or to settler owned scheme shops, unless the organization of cooperatives can be improved. As to housing, settlers generally feel that the house they have been sold is too expensive (\$2-3,000), too small, constructed in a style that they do not appreciate or is so badly made that it will not outlast the mortgage. In an unpublished report on the Triboh Scheme (Dixon, 1971), it is noted that most families construct at their own expense an additional house on their rubber lot, which a full 70 per cent prefer to the house built for them in the scheme settlement. This suggests that settlers might be allowed to build their own houses, being provided only materials, minimum specifications and possibly skilled carpenters for technical advice, although the practicability of this must be carefully examined beforehand. As a more immediate solution, the present cumbersome restrictions on making improvements to existing dwellings should be relaxed in order to encourage a greater sense of ownership and better standards of maintenance.

4. Settlers

4.1 Background and Selection

The objectives of existing settlement schemes have already been outlined in Section 2.3 and these define the types of settlers, which schemes are meant to attract. What is needed is a thorough assessment of the potential settler population as defined by these objectives. The extent of landlessness, overuse, or the degradation of land under shifting cultivation through too frequent clearance; remoteness of farm families from markets, etc. need to be measured and areas of highest priority identified. Until such an assessment is made and potential settlers can be identified, and reached through an effective programme of publicity, schemes are likely to face a shortage of active applicants.

At the moment communication is a serious problem. In addition to publicity itself, and, perhaps, even more important, is the accuracy of information about scheme life that is conveyed to potential settlers. Many accepted settlers are disappointed to find scheme conditions different than they had imagined or were led to expect. To deal with this settlers themselves might be used to recruit others and visits to a scheme might be arranged for accepted applicants prior to permanent settlement together with an orientation course in which the terms of scheme entry are fully described. At Lambir those with first-hand knowledge of the scheme were generally able to make a more rational decision, and while many withdrew from the scheme, those who chose to take up residence are generally more satisfied than those who came without prior knowledge.

Finally many settlers are too old by the time they enter schemes; at Lambir over a third of all settlers, including those whose trees are still immature, are over 50, and a large percentage will have retired from active labour before their loans can be repaid, if repayment is possible at all.

4.2 Reasons for moving to a scheme

There are three major reasons for migration:

- (a) Landlessness or ownership of land that is uneconomical to cultivate.

This reason is mentioned by settlers of all ethnic groups. Prior to moving onto the scheme most Malay settlers were semi-urban wage labourers and, in addition to a rubber lot, some were attracted to the scheme by the possibility of acquiring a house from which they could not be evicted where their children might remain to care for them in their old age. A number of Iban settlers, in addition to having no land or inadequate land to support their families, sacrificed their individual interests in that by moving to the scheme they relinquished land in their original longhouse for the benefit of kinsmen left behind.

- (b) Large family size. Having a large number of dependants to support may also be an important consideration, although few settlers mentioned it explicitly as such. This is particularly true of Malay settlers whose mean family size at Lambir is 7.2 persons. While Iban families are considerably smaller (4.9 persons), this is due partly to the fact that they split, particularly three - generation families, in order to be eligible for a maximum number of plots when entering a scheme.

- (c) Low or irregular income. As was noted earlier (3.2), most Malay settlers continue to hold outside employment and scheme earnings are viewed primarily as a source of supplemental income. Most Iban, on the other hand, found farm incomes inadequate in their home areas, and many were already migrants from the countryside who were unable to find other forms of steady employment before moving onto the scheme.

A final factor is security. The interest of Malay settlers in acquiring a house is partly related to their concern with being looked after when they are too old to support themselves. In addition both Iban and Malay feel a strong sense of obligation to pass onto their descendents an inheritance and scheme land may be important for this reason even to those who are relatively urbanized. Some settlers feel that by moving to a scheme their welfare is now in the hands of the government and they can expect to be looked after.

4.3 Adjustment to scheme life

Settlers come from various kampongs, towns and longhouses with their own localized patterns of leadership, social organization, and so on, and while these patterns are maintained to some degree, settlers, from the moment they enter a scheme, must also adjust to a new organizational set-up made up of

- supervisory and clerical staff, service personnel; and
- formal and informal settler organizations.

In order to ease the process of adjustment and allow for better use of technically trained personnel on established schemes, settler organizations need considerable strengthening and should be granted more responsibility particularly in the matters pertaining to settlement life. At present most of these organizations are management-sponsored and need to be tied more closely to existing leadership within the settlement community.

Appointment of a Settler Affairs and Settler Development Officer is recent, but these persons and their assistants can make an important contribution along these lines by encouraging the development of such organizations, voicing settler grievances, and, in general, acting as a communication link between settlers and staff.

Most Malay settlers at Lambir have continued in the occupations they held before moving to the scheme and the move is therefore mainly a change in residence and the problem of adjustment is relatively minor. Home communities are generally close enough to allow for frequent visits and most Malay settlers had a reasonably informed idea of what life would be like on the scheme before they took up residence. In comparison, much greater change is required of Iban settlers; they generally come from a greater distance, know less about scheme conditions, and must frequently sever ties with former friends and relatives. Organized activities, such as film showings, are either not present, or insufficiently developed, to overcome the sense of isolation they are likely to feel.

4.4 Factors influencing the stability of settler populations

It is sometimes argued that a major reason for non-residence, poor maintenance of scheme lots or, in general, instability of labour is the previous practice at Lambir of granting settlers immediate title to their land without writing in conditions for its transfer that would prevent abuse of this type from occurring. While contracts must certainly contain conditions, this, by itself, is only part of the problem that schemes face. Conditions, in themselves are no guarantee against abuse, and even when they exist it may be impossible, for political or other reasons, to evict settlers, as experience in West Malaysia shows. To successfully attract settlers, and satisfy their demands, schemes must be able to produce a reasonably high level of income and be sufficiently flexible to accommodate changing market conditions and future population growth. At Lambir, many settlers are not working their rubber lots because it makes no economic sense to them to do so, given the existence of other alternatives, and what they see as the long-term future of rubber production. Moreover, many feel that the scheme holds out little opportunity for themselves or their children, except as a source of minimal income to fall back on, should all else fail.

Difficult.

In fact, the situation with regard to titles appears to be much more complex than it is sometimes assumed to be, and many settlers at Lambir have either not received their titles or regard them as insecure. The latter view is particularly common with Chinese settlers, some of whom argue that the chief reason for non-residence (as well as for resignation from the scheme) is not that settlers received title to their land, but, on the contrary that, because of restrictions on loan repayment, clear titles are unobtainable, and they are, consequently, reluctant to invest their time in developing land to which their rights are ambiguous. They see little reason for describing as 'theirs' land which is permanently indebted, must be worked under supervision, and over which they have no control of the crops grown or the way they are marketed. All currently resident Chinese settlers indicate that they would welcome restrictions reserving their land for agricultural use in order to prevent it from being lost to speculators. Most feel that such restrictions, plus careful screening of applicants, would satisfactorily prevent abuse. On the other hand, the present situation, so far as titles are concerned, appears neither to define settlers' rights with any certainty nor grant the Land Development Board unequivocal power to evict settlers.

A major attraction of existing schemes is the possibility of acquiring a house and land (see 4.2). The whole idea of land settlement hinges on the geographical mobility of people, and land and the need for land has been a powerful motivating force in past migration (5.1). In this connection, an estate-type scheme, organized on a share-holding basis, is likely to face a considerable problem of settler recruitment, however desirable it might be as a source of foreign exchange or a basis for future industrial development. In addition, the rural population of Sarawak, in contrast to West Malaysia, or even Sabah, has had little experience with estates or the highly managed work regime that estates imply. Lack of independence is, therefore, likely to be another disincentive of estate development. Under existing circumstances, with few alternative employment opportunities available, unstable incomes as employed labourers, and the lack of pensions or other retirement provisions, concern with land among the existing rural population is rational. On the other hand, land is not the only factor that may cause rural people to move; in the Baram District, for example,

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interior people are moving downriver, in some cases out of relatively land-rich areas into those of marginal agricultural potential, because of the attraction of wage employment, easier travel, access to markets, schools, and other amenities. However, if settlers are not to be offered land, the objectives of land development are changed and alternative incentives must be provided.

4.5 Settler Development

At the moment existing schemes offer too few opportunities for the second generation. To older settlers, whose children are reaching maturity, this is a matter of genuine concern. At the present time, with undivided inheritance and a high birth rate, settlement schemes are generating an excess work force resulting in underemployment and the out-migration of landless dependants. While part of this force might be absorbed in future schemes, the degree to which this is possible is limited by the rate at which new land can be opened for settlement. Moreover, it may be socially undesirable to absorb all of this growth internally, even if it were possible, in as much as the purpose of schemes should be to broaden and equalize, rather than restrict, opportunities. Therefore careful thought should be given to subsidiary employment, including entry into scheme management positions, and planning should be done with consideration to total regional development and the creation of economic opportunities, both off and on schemes, throughout all sectors of the economy.

5. Migration

In order to make the movement of people onto schemes easier, a settlement board might be established with responsibility not only to screen potential settlers but also to create a labour force drawn from newly accepted applicants to use in clearing and developing future schemes. In this way newly accepted settlers would be provided employment and receive an income until their scheme holdings become productive and can absorb their labour. Training might also be undertaken during this time and settlers given an opportunity to adjust to settlement conditions. If labour demands warrant it, employment might also be offered to dependants of established settlers.

5.1 Attitudes toward movement

In Iban society there exists a well-developed tradition of migration, in the form of bejalai (to journey for the purpose of prestige or material profit) and pindah (to move permanently as a family or community), that continues to play an important role in the movement of families to scheme settlements. While many older people are unwilling to leave their longhouse, younger families can and do move, and one of our findings from Lambir is that most Iban settlers are already migrants before they decide to join a scheme. Table 5.1 shows the place of birth of Iban household heads and the geographical spread of present migration.

With Chinese and Malay settlers there appear to be somewhat greater obstacles to movement, particularly in the latter case. Malay migration at Lambir is restricted largely to the surrounding area as shown in Table 5.2, and it may require a reorientation in values to alter this pattern. The lack of scope for individual initiative built into existing schemes is a strong disincentive to Chinese settlers many of whom have experience in commercial farming. A more attractive programme to such persons would be one that makes land available for agricultural development, perhaps on a long-term lease basis conditional on development, but leaves the choice of crops and so on to the settlers themselves. While such a programme might be most attractive at the moment to Chinese settlers, others could also be drawn in if it were tied to a system of training and farm extension.

TABLE 5.1 PLACE OF BIRTH OF IBAN HOUSEHOLD HEADS

Community leaders (Tuai Rumah)	Second Division					Third Division					Fourth Division			Total household head by Tuai Rumah		
	Saribas	Bt. Lupar	Undop Partu	Lubok Antu	Saratok Skrang Banting	Katibas Oya	Bt. Rejang	Kapit Entabai	Machan Sarikei	Kanowit	Tatau	Bintulu	Bakong		Miri	
Spitt	1	1			1		13	2	1					1	1	21
Kirch				1	4	1	2	5	1	3	1	2		1	1	23
Anding	5					1								1		7
Kaju		4	1	9		1	1				1					22
Lawai				10	1	1	1					2	1	1	1	15
Hitch				10							3					13
Kanggang														2		6
Total	6	1	4	1	29	2	5	1	3	17	14	2	3	1	2	107
Percentage of Total															46	14

Table 5.2 Place of birth of 'Malay' household heads

Ethnic Group	Fourth Division				Third Division		First Division	Total	
	Miri	Baram	Bintulu	Third Division					
				Mukah	Sibu				
Melanau			1		3			4	
Kedayan	5							5	
Narum		2						2	
Miri Malay								13	
Malay						1	3	4	
Totals	18	2	1		3	1	3	28	
Percentage of total	75						14	11	100

5.2 Existing patterns of migration by ethnic community

Iban migration onto existing schemes is largely by groups under a recognized leader. While there is some movement of individual families, these persons are usually among the original followers of a leader already settled on the scheme or, if not, quickly ally themselves with such leaders once they take up residence. While leaders exercise little real control over their followers, their role in mobilizing migration is significant and needs to be taken into account in designing recruitment policies.

Iban out-migration is well established and frequently involves movement over long distances. At Lambir 46 per cent of resident Iban settlers are from the Second Division, 40 per cent from the Third Division, and only 14 per cent from neighbouring areas of the Fourth Division. This is shown in Table 5.1.

What is significant is that such migration is rarely direct from the settlers' home area. Except for schemes such as Skrang, where settlers were relocated in intact or partially intact communities, most settlers are migrants, and have already left their home area in search of land, work, or for other reasons, prior to their arrival on a scheme. In regard to voluntary migration, then, potential settlers are most likely to be persons who are already detached from their traditional homes. Moreover, in moving to a scheme, they often come under a tuai rumah who is not necessarily a leader from their own area, and the groups that take form as a result frequently have a scattered geographical origin (see Table 4.1).

In contrast, Malay migration is mainly over short-distances and ties with friends and relatives left behind are usually maintained. At Lambir many Malay settlers first learned of the scheme, and were persuaded to join, due to the presence of resident kinsmen. Consequently the Malay feel less isolated, and, although ethnically heterogeneous, tend to be more unified than the Iban, and internal subgroupings have much less social importance and are not so great a hindrance to cooperation. Islam is also an important unifying factor. Malays also have higher incomes and greater access to jobs off the scheme and so are able to travel more and maintain a wider field of social relationships generally. Resident Chinese settlers are either Hakka or Foochow and are generally the least exclusive group, although the two dialect committees have their own leadership and keep largely to themselves.

6. Conclusion

Settlement schemes, in conclusion, need to be seen against alternative strategies for rural development. From the viewpoint of the individual participant a major disadvantage of existing schemes is their lack of flexibility. While highly managed schemes may be desirable as a way of improving the status of the currently disadvantaged sector of the rural population, they hold out little attraction for others, and more flexible programmes appear to be necessary in order to involve those who are especially able to contribute to economic growth because of education or previous experience.

No
suggestion
here.

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