

# TOO RAPID RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Perceptions and Perspectives from Southeast Asia



Colin MacAndrews and Chia Lin Sien

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Edited by

Colin MacAndrews

and

Chia Lin Sien



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## Too Rapid Rural Development

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## *Preface*

The idea for this book originated in the work being done by one of the editors (MacAndrews), first in Malaysia in the early 1970s and then for the last five years in Indonesia. In that period he was involved, both at the macro planning level and at a project level, in the design, implementation and evaluation of development projects in a number of different fields including land development schemes in Malaysia and large-scale regional planning projects in Indonesia. As one progressed through these different experiences and became closely involved in the development process in the different settings, one became aware of the limitations of different national development strategies. Although one could see a high degree of overall development in both countries, one was struck continuously by the lack of coherence in the different development strategies and the pressure to produce rapid results without thinking too far ahead about the consequences. The other editor (Chia) during the same period was developing his interests in the fields of environmental management and urbanization in the Southeast Asian area. His own experiences supported MacAndrews' own feeling that there was a basic and important question to be asked about the pace of development that certainly seemed often to be far too rapid.

In looking beyond our discussions and one's felt perception that this was a topic that needed to be addressed, and one which was also particularly relevant to the Southeast Asian region due to the accelerated growth in recent years, we found that our own perceptions were shared by many of our colleagues working in the region. As a result we decided to bring together in this volume contributions from foremost practitioners in the Southeast Asian region, examining from their own experience the process



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xiv of development in different projects they have been associated with. In selecting the five countries (i.e., Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines) of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), we focused on countries in the region that have seen rapid growth in the last two decades, and to whom the questions of whether that growth was too rapid or not and whether policies were or were not appropriate were of particular relevance. We would like to have had contributions from Burma or from Indo-Chinese states but in neither case was this possible. In approaching contributors we sought people with recent practical experience as we felt that the main contribution of a volume such as this was to provide practical insights and perceptions from those who had been actually involved in development projects or the formulation of development policies. We did not ask our contributors to specifically address the problem of too rapid rural development, but asked them to examine the policies they have been involved in to see how they could have been better planned and how they fitted into the broader framework of the overall development strategy of the country concerned. The result is not a tightly structured book but one which we hope has drawn on the best of the different authors' experience and reflects accurately the existing state of affairs in the region.

We are grateful to our contributors for these papers written specifically for this book. We also enjoyed our stimulating cooperative venture and the informal contacts made through the project. Our thanks are owed to a number of people, particularly to Dr. William H. Frederick of Ohio University who was instrumental in arranging for us to publish through the Ohio University Press. We hope by doing this to attract a wide audience and provide a mechanism for wider discussion of what we think is an important topic.

We should, of course, add one caveat; that the opinions expressed by our authors remain their own.

Colin MacAndrews and  
Chia Lin Sien

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# Introduction

## Problems of Rapid Development

by  
Chia Lin Sien  
and  
Colin MacAndrews

With the widespread economic development in the Third World countries in recent years, "development" has tended to become a catchword in government and political circles, usually associated with progress and the equitable distribution of benefits. Yet in practice, for all the government resources, both financial and political, that have been channeled into development efforts in Third World countries, it is questionable whether these have been particularly successful in achieving their aims.

This dichotomy between what is assumed to be the achievements of development policies and what in fact takes place raises some basic questions about the utility of development strategies. It would seem that development strategies in many countries may well have been unrealistic in their declared aims of trying to raise general poverty levels or spread widely the benefits of development. In some cases policies have clearly been introduced too quickly due to the pressure for accelerated growth without adequate preplanning. It is also apparent that there has been a marked lack of coordination

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2 in a number of countries between various development policies that has seriously limited their effectiveness. Overall there is a need for a reappraisal of existing development strategies. While clearly there is no one model for development that can meet the different conditions in the individual countries, there is a wealth of experience to be learned from the analysis of the existing policies—an analysis that can provide practical guidance as to how such policies might be improved. This approach is not to decry the need for theoretical frameworks to provide coherence to different development strategies or the need to establish valid theoretical bases to help our understanding of the development process, but it does emphasize the urgency of learning from past experience and of trying to improve existing development policies through an analysis of past mistakes.

The eight case studies of development brought together in this collection focus on the potential and also the weaknesses of current development policies in one particular area, that of Southeast Asia. Three themes in particular run through the discussion. One is the marked lack of coordination between the many different policies in any one country that greatly limits their overall impact. The second is the tendency of policy makers to ignore or to fail to take into account the often powerful influence of local social and cultural institutions. Development policies are too often designed to meet immediate demands and are expected to achieve quick success, but in this process they frequently fail to call on the experience and strength of traditional resources. In fact, in the hurry to pursue quick results policies have sometimes been introduced that have led to the disruption or destruction of local institutions and traditional ways which are a vital part of these countries. Again it is clear that development policies have tended only to directly benefit small segments of the population and elite groups. They often represent policies imposed by the government on the participants and to a greater or lesser extent have



lacked the support and cooperation of local populations. Finally, in the search for quick success policy makers have often ignored dangerous and foreseeable side effects that in the long run may bring about additional if not greater problems. Generally, in looking at development policies in the Southeast Asia region it is clear that the emphasis on accelerated development has resulted in inadequate attention being paid to basic problems of coordination and planning as well as to the consequences of the various policies.

### *The Region*

The Southeast Asian region which is the focus of study of this book consists of some 4.2 million square kilometers of highly fragmented land area interspersed with wide stretches of sea. Physically the region is divided into a continental or mainland section comprising Burma, Thailand and the Indochina states of Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam. The rest of the region, including Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines, is regarded as the archipelago of Southeast Asia. The countries of the region fall into two distinct groups reflecting their historical evolution. One group of those countries consists of what is now the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) consisting of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines—countries which have had relatively stable political conditions and have seen considerable economic development over the last 20 years in particular. The second group of countries is one which has suffered from war and chronic political instability, and includes the Laos Peoples' Democratic Republic, the Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam. Development for the latter group of countries has been severely hampered and there has been very little growth.

The diversity of the region can be illustrated in a number of ways. In terms of population the countries of the ASEAN range from Indonesia with a population of 150 million to Singapore with its tiny population