

Red Tape Snarls Viet Farm Aid

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SAIGON.

American bureaucratic red-tape and in-fighting have caused serious delays in President Johnson's pet project of low-cost rural electrification for Vietnamese peasants.

The program, announced by President Johnson last June as part of his Southeast Asia aid plans, is at least six months behind schedule, one source said. A \$5 million Congressional appropriation earmarked especially for the three-province cooperative electricity project has been diverted elsewhere, the source added, while funds for the project itself "are just trickling in."

In addition, the villagers are incensed. One American said peasants threw stones at him in An Giang Province, where a promised cooperative is still to be built.

Vietnamese villagers also have sent letters to President Johnson—unrelayed by aid officials here—and to the Vietnamese Chief of State both protesting the delays in the rural electrification project, though expressing future hopes for it.

Most American and Vietnamese officials have fought tooth-and-nail for the project, designed to bring low cost electricity to 250,000 villagers in Tuyen Duc, Bien Hoa and An Giang Provinces.

NIT-PICKING

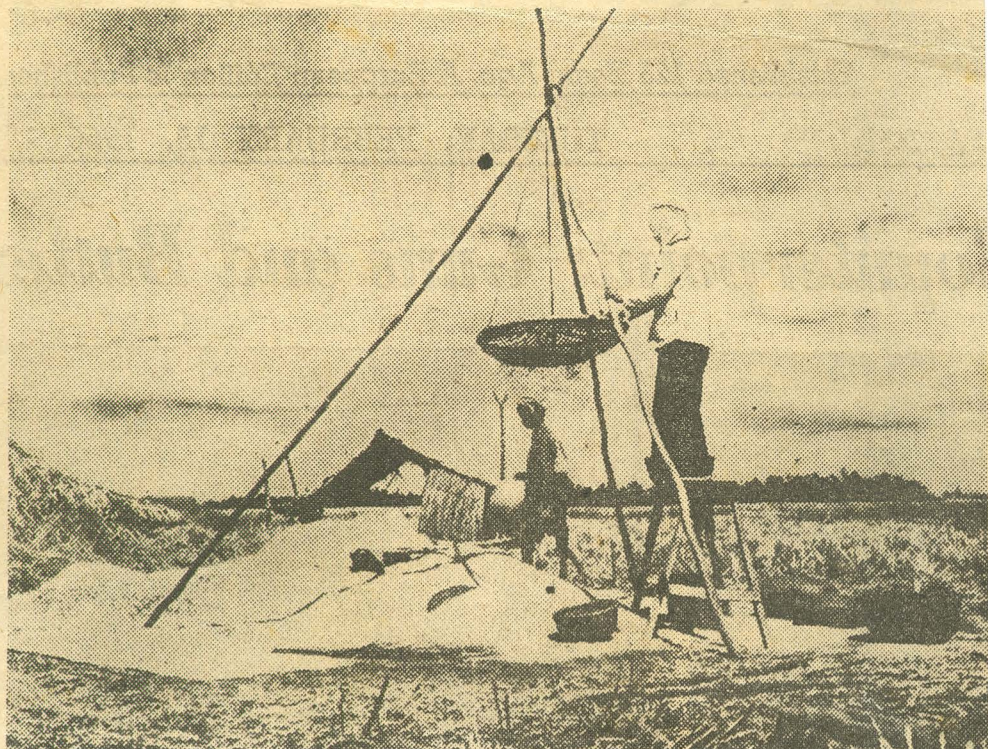
One of them explained:

"We have the approval of the President, the Washington officials, the Vietnamese government, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge—but the middle-level American bureaucrats didn't get the word. They caused us delay after delay. Those bastards have caused us to lose at least six months time."

"I didn't think nit-picking bureaucrats could subvert Congress and the President, but, sister, they sure can. We got two lines in the Honolulu Declaration (about rural electrification)—maybe that will shut them up. And maybe Mr. Humphrey will ask enough questions to get things moving."

The Vice-President visited South Viet Nam last week.

As envisioned by President Johnson, construction was to have started on the projects last November, with completion scheduled for this April. The three provinces involved are Tuyen Duc, 150 miles northeast of Saigon with 72,000 potential electricity



THE RURAL-ELECTRIFICATION PROGRAM in South Viet Nam bogged down in red tape would help peasants like these, shown using a centuries-old technique—a sieve-like basket and makeshift tripod—to thresh their rice for harvest.

users; An Giang Province, 90 miles southwest of Saigon, with 150,000 users and Bien Hoa Province, 30 miles northeast of Saigon, with 60,000 users.

QUESTIONS

"But the middle-level bureaucrats threw up block after block and then counter-blocks to stop the program. The bureaucrats ask thousands of questions—and it takes thousands of hours to answer the questions. So we lost time day by day," one irritated official said.

"So you write a memo to explain the project and some bureaucrat hides it in his bottom desk drawer for a week and you have to go persuade him gently to pull it out."

"Then he refers it to another department for signatures or counter-signatures and you lose more time."

"The American agencies all have manual after manual defining the relationship of everyone to everyone else—so whenever someone wants to do something, there's always a rule to stop you," the source continued.

"One American bureaucrat pulled out the manual and pointed to the rule prohibiting me to do something. I said, 'I don't care about the rules—I want to help win the war here.' The Saigon bureaucrat told me, 'I do care about the rules—and that's all I care

about. My job is to watch the rules."

(A recent management survey team has recommended the reorganization of the U.S. Agency for Internal Development. (AID) in Saigon.)

One American became so angered by bureaucratic delays he considered resigning—but didn't. Another debated writing to his congressman, "but these bureaucrats even have Congress under their thumb." The in-fighting once became so intense that American officials threatened each other with calling in congressional investigations.

SINCE APRIL '65

The program began in April, 1965, when President Johnson sent a six-man group to Viet Nam, to analyze the feasibility of low-cost co-operative power in the countryside and how the development should be handled.

"Forty six days later the President had announced the projects and we were floored, things were moving so fast," one official explained. "Then we got the \$5 million congressional appropriation earmarked for the three-province project in Viet Nam and it really looked like things were flying high."

"All we had to do was to get our engineers material here and we could begin construction in November. Then the President announced we'd begin construction in Novem-

ber and the Vietnamese villagers were also told that."

He continued:

"But what we were too unsophisticated to realize was the skilled shrewd, vicious oppositionists, who with back-kniving, with asking questions, blocked us for months after month."

"We're still going to win this war, but we don't deserve to win the way we're operating now."

The first step in establishing the rural cooperative requires discussions and meetings with village leaders, and then the population. The most work has been done in Tuyen Duc province, where it was reported that the first day 41 per cent of the people in five selected hamlets were lined up to sign the application and become shareholders for 100 piastres.

Some of them had to wait in line for more than an hour to get up to the desk. That was about 41 per cent of the 11,000 families in the area. The village chief said he expects 80 per cent could be signed up shortly. But one official said:

"We've had to stop signing up people. Once they sign up and pay their 100 piastres they want the power immediately. They can not understand the delays that we're having. We're sitting on a powder keg because these people are driving me crazy. Once they pay their 100 piastres they want electric power right now."