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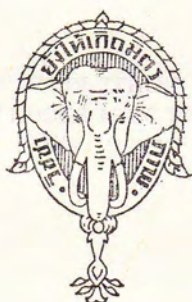
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LAO POPULAR BUDDHISM AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

by

Vongsavanh Boutsavath & Georges Chapelier*

Introduction

During the last ten years, the referents of the term Community Development have become broader. All psycho-sociological schemes by which governments of young nations attempt to assist, promote and guide the socio-cultural and technical changes of their rural communities¹ are now subsumed under the term Community Development, although in its original meaning it covered little more than projects for adult literacy and self-help.

Although the programmes are extremely diversified according to the particular needs of each country, we find everywhere the same concern for awaking the rural population to greater community consciousness and participation in the process of modernization.

However, this conscious participation of the people in their own change depends on local leaders and the institutions which they manage, as well as on their ability to explain the messages from the centre of modernization by giving them a positive connotation. They must also express, in turn, the villagers' reactions and needs and act as a catalyst for the energies and the dynamics essential to the work of development.

It matters little whether leaders are traditional and informal or whether they come from Rural Action Groups, but in the former case it is essential that the traditional values linked to their role do not constitute an obstacle to the modern ideology of the programme. This is the problem which besets all attempts to use indigenous leaders in official programmes; how can one mobilise them without destroying the

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1) De Decker, H., 1966, p. 210

"In its sociological dimension, community development appears as a process oriented by socialization (or by integration) of traditional communities to [a new culture] which will enable people to assimilate the new values and techniques of progress."