

News of the arts

Canadian support for human settlements in Asia

In Bangkok, one form of Canadian help to Asia is coming to an end while a new type of assistance is just beginning, reports Allan Thornley in *Development Directions*, May/June 1979. The story involves the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), a decade of Canadian co-operation in "third-country training", and a new effort to focus on the human settlements approach to development explored by the Habitat Conference at Vancouver in 1976.

Training

"Third-country training" is an arrangement whereby people from developing countries receive advanced training under relatively familiar conditions, at a regional institution located usually in a neighbouring country, rather than in Europe or North America.

The Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok, one of the world leaders in third-country training, is now celebrating its twentieth anniversary. In 1959, a school of graduate engineering was created on the campus of Chulalongkorn University. In 1967 it became the AIT, chartered by the Royal Thai Government as an autonomous international institution of higher learning. Today it is an internationally recognized centre of engineering excellence, and a major regional resource in Asia's effort to reach higher levels of economic and social development.

CIDA's contribution

Co-operation between Canada and AIT has been partly responsible for the contribution to development in Southeast Asia. Since 1970, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has provided more than \$3 million to finance about 180 scholarships, some equipment, ten regional conferences, and the service of Canadian members on AIT's faculty.

Hundreds of students from many Asian countries — especially Thailand, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, the Philippines and Pakistan — attended the institute to prepare themselves to take part in their countries' development efforts. A survey some years ago indicated AIT's program was having a marked regional effect, with 95 per cent of graduates working in Asian governments, industries and universities.

In a relatively short time, AIT achieved its primary goal: to alleviate the critical shortage of highly-trained engineers in the developing countries of Southeast Asia.

Now, Canadian support to AIT will take a new direction. One of the most pressing world problems today is rapid growth of cities: by the end of the century urban population will outnumber rural population for the first time in history.

The cutting edge of this process is seen in the countless *bustees* and *kampongs*, *favelas* and *ranchos* of the Third World's swelling cities; it is estimated 75,000 more people arrive daily, creating massive needs for shelter, employment, clean water, health care and other services.

The emphasis on human settlements is an attempt to break through some of the problems that have hampered past development efforts. As AIT explained in the plan of operations for its new division: "The human settlements approach focuses on the spatial units of society — its regions, cities, villages and communities — as the appropriate units for the implementation of social and economic development. This approach aims at reaching all people, particularly those now being neglected, and bringing them into the orbit of improvement and advancement."



In Asia's cities, squatter settlements are swelling rapidly creating massive needs for shelter, employment, clean water and other services.

A new Canadian initiative, financed by a \$2.2-million CIDA grant, will give impetus to AIT's human settlements program, started in 1977. It provides for 125 scholarships for graduate studies in human settlements development for students from Southeast Asian countries. It will also finance a variety of educational efforts — research, short courses, demonstration projects, conferences, and field visits by students — as well as paying for the sharing of information on human settlements development, and a small amount of equipment.

Program goals

The program itself is already in progress. It has three main goals: (1) educating high-quality manpower for human settlements planning, development, management and education; (2) research in human settlements in the Asia region; and (3) dissemination of information. As of September 1977, 23 students from 13 Asian countries were enrolled and more students from 16 Asian countries applied for entry in 1978.

It is estimated that when the present agreement between AIT and Canada nears its completion in 1984, close to 200 Asian students will have obtained Master's degrees in human settlements development. Approximately 125 of them will have benefited from Canadian scholarships, 25 from AIT scholarships, and the balance from scholarships financed by other donors.