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SAI LONE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF OPIUM REDUCTION IN
BURMA: LOCAL PERSPECTIVES FROM THE WA REGION. THESIS
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The focus of this study is on the socioeconomic impacts of rural development projects implemented by international development aid agencies on the livelihood of former opium farmers whose major income source, i.e. opium cultivation, has been banned in the Wa region of Shan state, Burma. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methodology was applied in this research. Information had been collected by conducting in-depth interview with former opium farmers, senior local authorities, and project staff of international development aid agencies in the Wa region. Literature review was useful for theoretical approach in analyzing data collected from the field study, and it was also utilized to discover the success stories and lessons learnt from Thai experience on opium reduction which clearly showed that humanitarian crisis could be avoided if the ban on opium cultivation was carried out with the maximum participation of all the stakeholders. Comparison of socioeconomic conditions of the case study villages gives a clear picture of the villagers' life qualities before and after the opium ban.

Firstly of all, the root-cause of opium cultivation had been explored to identify the extent of socioeconomic reliance of the farmers on opium, and the impact of opium on the local economy. Secondly, this study made an attempt to discover the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of opium ban, which authoritatively enforced by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) without any preparation of alternative livelihood for the opium farmers. It revealed the coping strategies adopted by the local population, which included expansion of food cultivation area, migration as causal labour, exploitation of natural resources, particularly non-timber forest products in unsustainable manner. Forest depletion caused by illegal logging and expansion of rubber plantation which carried out in order to fill the coffers of local authorities was also discovered. Thirdly, development strategies and approaches of the projects which implemented by international development institutions have been assessed to identify their impacts on the livelihood of former opium farmers. With technical know-how, materials and financial inputs, the rice shortage problem has been solved to a certain extent, however the economic need of the former opium farmers are still far behind being met.

This study suggests development strategies and approaches by which the socioeconomic needs of former opium farmers can be solved. It also recommends further research on other crop substitution endeavours which will have serious impacts both on environment and livelihood of the former opium farmers.

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