



Chronicles from the Field: The Townsend Thai Project

Robert M. Townsend, Sombat Sakunthasathien, Rob Jordan

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Running since 1997 and continuing today, the Townsend Thai Project has tracked millions of observations about the economic activities of households and institutions in rural and urban Thailand. The project represents one of the most extensive datasets in the developing world. *Chronicles from the Field* offers an account of the design and implementation of this unique panel data survey. It tells the story not only of the origins and operations of the project but also of the challenges and rewards that come from a search to understand the process of a country's economic development. The book explains the technical details of data collection and survey instruments but emphasizes the human side of the project, describing the culture shock felt by city-dwelling survey enumerators in rural villages, the "surprising, eye-opening, and inspiring" responses to survey questions, and the never-ending resourcefulness of the survey team. The text is supplemented by an epilogue on research findings and policy recommendations and an appendix that contains a list and abstracts of published and working papers, organized by topic, using data from the project. Social and economic policies are too often skewed by political considerations. The Townsend Thai Project offers another basis for policy: accurate measurement based on thoroughly collected data. From this, a clear template emerges for understanding poverty and alleviating it.

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