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PROBLEMS IN ADMINISTERING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE[1/]

by
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My assignment, as you know, is to make a few comments on problems of giving and administering technical assistance. The nature of the assignment and my approach to it necessitates my making a few prefatory statements to establish the context of what I am to say later. I make them with great earnestness and sincere hope that all my later comments will be interpreted against them. I wish to stress the fact that I am speaking as one Agricultural Economist to another; not as a spokesman of the Agency for International Development.

First, I wish to call attention to the fact that my assignment is to discuss problems. Unless one carefully guards against it, this concentration on problems may lead to the inference that the giving and administering of technical assistance is so loaded with problems, difficulties and misconceptions that the entire undertaking may not be worth the effort. A symposium on problems of teen-agers might similarly lead to the impression that all teen-agers are juvenile delinquents. Therefore, I wish to state categorically what I feel very deeply: that the technical assistance program of AID and its predecessors, with all its short-comings, has been an extraordinarily effective undertaking whether judged against other aspects of the U.S. aid program, or against any domestic governmental program, if due weight is given to the enormity and inherent underlying difficulty of the problem to which it is addressed. I could document this opinion but time does not permit. Let me underscore it, merely, by one general comment. Our technical assistance projects in agriculture, for example our University contracts, have left tremendously changed institutional structures in a large number of countries around the world. The significance of this can be appreciated when we reflect on the fact that this was accomplished normally by a very small team of Americans--outsiders--frequently in a country with only indifferent political relations with our own at the time. It reached into deep, long established traditions, almost always involved working against the vested bureaucratic and often political interests of most of the counterparts with whom we worked. For example, in the part of India where I worked, the net effect of our efforts was to reorganize vastly the structure of agricultural research, education, extension and development programs. This required the Director of Agriculture to surrender his college of agriculture and his responsibility for all research. The Director of Animal Husbandry similarly had to surrender his research and teaching institutions. The Community Development and Planning Departments were obliged to surrender large portions of their bureaucratic responsibilities. Departments of Horticulture and Forestry were either completely eliminated or vastly modified. Research officers were deprived of substantial per diem allowances, derived from their circuits of little branch experiment stations. Yet this was done by a small team of American advisors with almost nothing to offer but their good will, integrity and such competence as they could command. Would the university or government agency from which you individually come undertake such a traumatic reorganization on the strength of advice from a group of so-called "experts" from a neighboring state, let us say? So this is my first caveat: that my concentration on problems should not mislead you to incorrect inferences regarding the effectiveness of our technical assistance programs.

Second, I should like to explain the seemingly critical tone of my comments. The Honorable John Gardner, before he assumed his present post as Secretary of

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1/ Views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Agency for International Development.

Health, Education and Welfare, served on a high level advisory committee to AID and at our request made a study which he reported under the title "AID and the Universities." In presenting his verbal report to the Executive Staff of the Agency, he stated that in the extensive staff work underlying his report, he found that AID employees--past, present, and at all levels--were extremely self-critical: of themselves, of the Agency, of past and present practices. Unfortunately, he said, similar self-criticism was not nearly as prevalent nor as forthcoming from the university side. Having spent roughly half of the time I have been involved in foreign work on the university and half on the AID side, I can certainly confirm this general conclusion. Therefore, if my comments appear to be critical, I can only point out that this is totally within my Agency's very happy tradition of self-analysis, self-examination, and self-criticism--which is probably one of its outstanding sources of strength.

Third, I should like to define my use of the pronoun "we". The technical assistance program as conducted by AID has over the years involved many more people from outside the Agency than from within. It has been based upon the scientific competence, the scholarship, the ideas, of the many professions concerned with agricultural development. It has been limited by the degree of public understanding which eventually is reflected in Congressional support. It has utilized constantly the advice, counsel, criticism, and assistance of large numbers of advisory committees, consultants, short-time participants, professional and trade associations, and voluntary agencies. Therefore, when I use the term "we" I specifically am not using it to refer to AID, but to this entire complex of ideas, of scholarship, of public understanding and support; in short, "we" simply means the American people in its full institutional complexity as it relates to the foreign assistance effort.

Lastly, my comments are related largely to the type of technical assistance done by American universities. This is a large part of our agricultural assistance and that in which you are most interested. In doing so, I will not concentrate much attention on the administrative details of the execution of university contracts. One could list anecdote after anecdote, some humorous and some not at all funny, illustrating problems in contract administration. These difficulties derive out of the problems of working in so many different countries, from the all too frequent change in key AID personnel, from the extremely complex web of relationships and communications among AID/Washington, the home campus, the USAID Mission, the field teams, and the host governments.

I think it is well for us to reflect on the fact that the foreign aid effort is relatively new. We should not be surprised that not everything we have done has been perfect. At the time the foreign aid program was begun, our country was just for the first time emerging into the international scene as a major peacetime international leader. We have been at the game in a formal way only about 18 years. It has been experimental. It has undoubtedly undergone too many attempts at major changes in approach, leadership, etc. This has at least, however, enabled us to learn from experience. These administrative problems have been thoroughly discussed and studied on other occasions. Rather than rehash them here, I should like to describe a few basic, underlying causes which I feel create or give rise to the more serious problems in carrying out technical assistance in agriculture. I shall list these as general misconceptions or imperfect conceptions which "we"--in the sense I have defined the term--have held, are beginning better to understand, and must change in order to make technical assistance an even more powerful instrument than it has thus far proved to be.

No. 1. "We" have not fully comprehended that foreign aid generally and technical assistance specifically should be viewed as a basic, long-term instrument of U.S. policy. I personally believe this is the weakest point in the American view today, from which flows a great many other debilitating weaknesses.

In the eloquent words of Judge Frank M. Coffin, former Congressman and Deputy Administrator of AID, in his excellent book, WITNESS FOR AID:

> "In an era of restraint in the use of arms, aid will increasingly become a principal instrument of policy. Military forces are no longer the chessmen of international affairs. Words alone are hollow. Aid has emerged on the modern scene as an inevitable instrument serving the policy of great and not so great powers. We may dispute this fact. The Communist countries do not."

As in in explanation of this principle, and with equal eloquence, Sir Winston Churchill analyzed why the Japanese Navy opposed so strongly and to the last moment the Japanese Army's insistence on entering the second world war against the Allies in the following words:

> "The strongest check on the power and ambitions of the Army came from the Navy. In the nineteenth century the Japanese Army was trained by German instructors, and the Navy by British. This left lasting differences in mentality."

The same point is made at much greater length in Death of a Navy, by Andrei D'Albas, a high official in the Japanese Admiralty.

The reasons for this inadequate conception of the role of technical assistance are not difficult to understand; it is difficult to understand why scholarship has not addressed the problem more thoroughly. National development is a process of movement, of profound, deep-going searches for new approaches, new institutions. It is a movement toward objectives which in large part are evolved along the way. The processes by which those objectives are stipulated and the institutions are designed to achieve them, fundamentally determines the basic character of the country which emerges from the development process. As processes of childhood shape the character of the adult, so the processes of development determine the eventual character of the mature nation. To the extent that it is intelligent and effective, our participation in the building of institutions, shaping the policies, developing the human resources of the developing countries, helps shape the basic character of the country and thereby charts the destiny of our relationship to the country.

We should not be surprised that this takes time, that like any other instrument of policy and diplomacy it is not always successful, especially in the short run, that hindsight affords clues to improved action or approaches. We should be surprised if these things were not true. Fundamentally, technical assistance can never reach its full potential until its fundamental significance as an instrument of U.S. purpose in the international arena is thoroughly appreciated by the American people. Many of the shortcomings of other concepts which I shall list below derive from this basic inadequacy on this one point. This is not a criticism of AID, or of our government, or of anyone else--it is a characterization of American understanding and attitude during these last two decades.

The second shortcoming in concept derives from the first. It is the often mentioned "short term" focus of the AID program. Though we have been involved in technical assistance to the less developed countries since 1950, it has from the beginning been on a year-at-a-time basis. Though the Agency has consistently asked for longer term authorization for technical assistance, it has in fact been given not only the funds but even the authority only on a year-by-year basis. This has made it difficult fully to orient ourselves to meeting the reality of technical assistance: that although it should change through time, it is organic to the proper interplay of our country and the less developed countries, and should be projected against at least a ten-year or, better, a twenty-year planning horizon. The year-to-year, hand-to-mouth approach is inconsistent with effective interaction. Again

this shortcoming in concept derives not from AID policy, but is a reflection of the level of public conceptualization, understanding and support of the basic process.

A third shortcoming in concept is the failure to recognize the problem of scale. The fundamental characteristic of our technical assistance process in its broad sense is its minute size. In the entire field of agriculture we have fewer than 1500 people working overseas--direct-hire, contract and others. This may sound like a lot of people; but it can be understood only by getting to specifics. For example, in any one of the major states of India we may have from four to six or eight Americans working with something like four or five times the number of farmers in the United States. It is of course true that the bulk of the work has to be done by the Indians. It is their program and their country, and their responsibility; but the enormity of the process of improving agricultural development growth-rates simply is not reckoned with in the allocation of American human and professional resources. I sometimes make the point that it probably is true that more man-hours of American human resources are directed to the problem of agricultural development in the less developed world through conferences in this country than are spent overseas working on the problem. The number of highly trained professional agriculturists (in all fields) in the Washington headquarters of our Agency is about equal to an average Department of Agricultural Economics in an American university. The number of agriculturists working in some of our major countries is about equal to a good sized animal husbandry department in a single university, or the number of extension and backstop workers in a good size county or two in the United States. When I was in India, there were in the three Southern States of India combined, from five to eight American agriculturists of all types, mostly under university contract but including also the direct-hire people. There were in those States about 80 million people, about 50 million of whom made their living primarily from farming. So, the third major problem of conception is the inadequacy of our understanding of the problem of scale. Again, I feel the need primarily is for scholarship and research to lead to an understanding of this problem from which a public recognition can be achieved. The recent study of the President's Science Advisory Committee on the World Food Problem is one excellent step in this direction.

The fourth misconception has to do with the type of technical assistance that is needed if it is to be effective.

This misunderstanding has two components. First, we have failed to recognize that technical assistance, to be effective, must be essentially a research and development process.

This point requires some elaboration. It requires that we recognize that underdevelopment itself is largely the result of the historical lack of investment by the less developed country in the processes of what we now call research and development, including investment in institutions and people to carry out such research and development. The problem of underdevelopment is not primarily one of resources. There is really no discernible relationship between population-resource ratios and degrees or rates of development. Comparison of the Congo (which may be the richest in resources per capita in the world) and Switzerland or Japan would support this. Underdeveloped countries are underdeveloped because their processes are inefficient--production processes, technical processes, institutional processes, social processes, etc. Their economic policies are based on guess work or tradition rather than analysis; their agriculture fails to incorporate the new contributions of science; their machine production processes are inefficient or malfitting; their educational systems are borrowed rather than built to meet their needs, etc. The problem of development assistance is then, in a real sense, that of closing their efficiency gaps by bringing these countries forward in such a way that their production and other processes can become more nearly as efficient as our own.

Until recently, this fact has not been recognized widely by academic scholarship, by the public, by the politicians, by the countries, nor by our programs. Furthermore, the fact that our foreign aid program got its start with the Marshall Plan threw us off course on this point as, in that case, the basic idea that these countries could be restored by transference of capital resources from our country

to theirs was fundamentally sound--as it was a transference from one relatively efficient to another relatively efficient country. But the problem posed by foreign aid to less developed countries was entirely different, because here the transfer was from a relatively efficient to extraordinarily inefficient societies--inefficient both in the technical and in the economic and social sense.

Our common-sense recognition of this problem led the foreign aid program to the compensating mechanism of technical assistance, to correct these inefficiencies through technical advice. But this leads to the other limitation: that on most problems on which the countries need our technical advice, our state of the arts, our level of knowledge, our answers, our materiel of development simply do not work, cannot be applied, are not directly relevant or useful in the typical less developed country. This is, of course, an overstatement; but error lies in assuming that it is not rather than in assuming that it is the general case.

Until quite recently "we" have operated from a hidden major premise that technical assistance was primarily a matter of advice and demonstration. Such phrases as "what will work in Kansas will not work in Katmandu" have been popular for some time. But too often this has meant merely that we should understand better the attitudes and cultural characteristics of the Nepalese--missing the real point: that knowledge evolved to solve the problems of Kansas simply will not solve the problems around Katmandu--that we must therefore make the specific research investments necessary, to make the information, scientific knowledge, materiel, now useful in Kansas equally useful in the concerned less developed countries.

Until 1961, our Agency--again reflecting well rooted national attitudes--had no research program or budget as such. In fact, our policies strongly worked against incorporation of research as a part of our technical assistance projects--even discouraged training foreign professionals to the point of scientific competence. This was understandable: the prevailing view was that this country had the answers; technical assistance was needed only to spread the information.

Fortunately, this notion has quite thoroughly given ground to active recognition--and supporting policy--that our knowledge and technology, to be made relevant to the less developed countries must go through a great deal of adaptive research. This is perhaps the most promising single factor in the outlook for the world food problem today--namely, the recognition by agricultural leadership throughout our country that research processes are the essential instruments for modernizing agriculture in the less developed countries, and for making our knowledge, technology and expertize relevant to their needs. Several agricultural economists--Schultz, Hopper, Ruttan, to mention a few--have documented the case. I am pleased to say that in my first paper on the subject some 15 years ago, I anticipated it.* I wish I had been as right on a few other things.

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* "Some Theoretical Issues in Economic Development," Journal of Farm Economics, Proceedings Issue, December 1952.

PROBLEMS IN ADMINISTERING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

by
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Discussants have been urged to develop ideas in addition to those presented by persons giving major papers. This policy seems especially appropriate in this case since time requirements do not permit any one speaker to consider all of the pertinent problems of technical assistance. Dr. Long has done an excellent job in describing certain shortcomings or misconceptions, and I agree with his general point of view.

My remarks will emphasize problems of manpower in technical and backstopping positions. I have been impressed by the basic dedication of most Americans working in assistance programs around the world. This dedication has included the period of their foreign assignment and in most cases, has continued through the remainder of their professional careers. It is possible that their experience could have been more useful if some of the following problems had been solved.

University Backstopping. In some of our early contracts, Texas A&M University had not developed the art of technical backstopping. Persons recruited for overseas assignments moved to the payroll of the International Programs Office and lost contact with their professional colleagues. When they reentered professional circles two or more years later, they came back as strangers who had wasted some time in non-professional activities. On our Dominican Republic Contract, the University President has pledged the continuing assistance of the entire staff to the activity. Similarly, the Dean of Agriculture has studied the needs of the country and pledged the technical assistance of his department heads and their staffs. Each department has a Texas program and a Dominican program. A steady flow of consulting activities and reports keeps university personnel aware of the changing situation there. The staff abroad maintains close liaison with the home staff. This provides maximum efficiency in backstopping and facilities recruiting from the home staff.

Recommendation. That universities' contracts provide a continuing basis for close professional liaison between the parent university and the staff abroad to as great a degree as is required to make the contract a living part of university life.

Manpower Waste. There is a tendency for persons returning from technical assistance assignments to be removed from all aspects of the international environment in spite of a continuing interest in their former activities. This can be attributed to a failure to involve their professional colleagues during their overseas assignment, a desire to return to regular professional activities as soon as possible, and a lack of opportunity for participation within the regular activities of the university community. The international veterans gradually lose their interest and competence in foreign activities until such time as they succumb to the temptation to accept another assignment. Hopefully, these experienced technicians should provide a competent core for university excellence in the international dimension.

Recommendation. That the university contracts provide continuing partial financial support for persons returning from technical assignments. This support of ten percent or more of a year's salary could buy consulting time, research, analysis, publications, and a host of activities contributing directly to the international dimension. Both AID and the universities would gain.

Recruiting Systems. The general system of recruiting of technicians for overseas assignments by the universities, by AID and by private companies is basically inefficient. We operate professionally as specialists. We have biases toward specific locations, work assignments, and scientific methodology. Technical assignments abroad test the absolute limits of our professional flexibility. Persons find themselves in work situations having little relationship to their past work experiences. Not all professionals adjust to the needs of technical assistance. Not all wives or families respond well to new environments. The tendency of American technicians to spend the minimum period abroad makes recruiting a constant hunt for competent and flexible professionals. Existing rosters of persons having overseas experience and interest are helpful, but the process is still frustrating and inefficient.

Recommendation. That potential and experienced international technicians be organized into an Agricultural Technical Corps. Units should be established at universities having international activities. Individuals would be paid for attending regular weekly training sessions. They would have two weeks or more of experience abroad each year. Corps members would be available at any time for service abroad on a consulting or longer term basis. Communication would be maintained among units on a centralized basis. The organizational problems could be handled and the cost would be less than some other alternatives.

People Problems. The people of the United States have difficulty in understanding the work or play activities of Hippies, American Indians, Black Muslims and other minority groups. Since we have tendencies toward mass systems of distribution, conventional wisdom and the affluent society, there is not always a serious effort made to evaluate the nonconformist. It is no surprise than that our preference abroad is for people who respond like Americans to all types of motivations. Unfortunately, in the major developing areas, there are serious institutional barriers to American-type responses. Our technical agricultural training is especially deficient in its consideration of anthropology, sociology, psychology, world history or other sources of information on the people of the world. Courses of indoctrination given by Americans under American surroundings are not entirely successful in bridging this gap. Merely saying that there really are no "ugly Americans" does not insure that communication really takes place to the point that optimum or even sensible recommendations are made by technicians.

Recommendation. That analyses of local populations by competent social scientists be a sizable required portion of all activities abroad. This would include appropriate summaries of national goals and policies, institutional limitations, constraints relative to desired development and appropriate considerations of propensities to work, save, consume, spend, worship and plan families.

The international programs have a tremendous value and a real appeal to many of us. I have been amazed at the grip which an overseas experience has and the genuine desire to return for another tour as soon as possible. Perhaps our greatest weakness is an unwillingness to stay away from the United States for a long period of time. If we accept this as a constant, then the major requirement is to utilize efficiently those persons who have had and will have this experience. Currently, the leakage in utilization is a disgrace. Surely a nation with our organizational ability can organize technical assistance on some less haphazard basis.

Discussion: PROBLEMS IN ADMINISTERING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE by Erven J. Long

by
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What is technical assistance? What should it be? What should what it should be, be called?

These are the kinds of questions to which I kept returning as I attempted to respond to the Chairman's invitation to develop some of my own thoughts as I discuss Dr. Long's paper and the topic assigned.

These questions have more than semantic significance, important as semantics may be.

Dr. Long speaks many times of technical assistance in his paper. At the risk of being accused, properly, of quoting out of context, let me refer to some of these usages: He speaks of technical assistance as . . . for example, our university contracts . . . the technical assistance program as conducted by AID . . . technical assistance can never reach its full potential until its fundamental significance as an instrument of U. S. purpose in the international arena is thoroughly understood by the American people . . . technical assistance to be effective must be essentially a research and development process . . . technical assistance was primarily a matter of advice and demonstration . . . this notion has quite thoroughly given ground to active recognition--and supporting policy--that our knowledge and technology, to be made relevant to the less developed countries, must go through a great deal of adaptive research . . . and finally, . . . "research processes are the essential instruments for modernizing agriculture in the less developed countries . . ."

The words, technical assistance, are thus used by Dr. Long to encompass the whole continuum of foreign assistance activities from the simple, dictionary and common usage connotation of instruction in an art, craft, or practical skill, on the one hand, to the complex concept of that advice which is possible following appropriate research and development processes within a favorable environment, on the other.

Dr. Long says "we" have participated in the development of such concepts and usages. Perhaps <u>we</u> should clarify what it is we really mean.

My own preference is to use a limited definition of the words technical assistance. To me they connote the act or process of giving advice or instruction on some matter of practical significance. It makes a world of difference, however, how the knowledge on which the technical assistance is based, is derived. Being a research-oriented person I naturally hold to the view that the quality and effectiveness of technical assistance is dependent even more on its genesis than it is on the manner in which the technical assistance is extended, important as the method of extension is. The importance of high quality, potentially effective technical assistance is so crucial that I would prefer to see new terminology developed that would put the emphasis on the <u>process</u> by which the technical assistance is generated rather than on the product--technical assistance, itself. How about technical assistance generation products? Within this audience I'm tempted to mention two other possibilities: International Education and University Exchange.

Let me illustrate by an over-brief reference to the American experience. More than 100 years ago men of perhaps more vision than they realized provided for the creation in each state of institutions dedicated to the education of the "people." About 25 years later provision was evolved for agricultural experiment

stations in each state. Later still, numerous field stations were created within the states wherein work even more attuned to local conditions could be undertaken. I am reminded at this point of the comment of Karl Baur, Soil Scientist at the Western Washington Experiment Station, Puyallup. We had just gone through the exercise of removing the word "Branch" from the eight stations in Washington State. Partly this was suggested by the former use of the word Branch in the Tree Fruit station at Wenatchee--the former name was Tree Fruit Branch . . . We chose to rename the field locations as Outlying Stations. Karl's remark was, "Nobody can outlie the Main Station!" And there was truth as well as humor in it especially for the locations in western Washington.

Quite a little later, still, there was provision for the Extension Service and for vocational agriculture. Private companies got into the act, there was further proliferation of public agencies, firm and commodity groups, etc. Technical assistance became widely accepted and demanded.

The point is that really high quality, effective technical assistance and its use followed and flowed from this complex of individual, institutional, political and societal developments and interactions. It was a product of a process that itself was nurtured and supported by an environment that had become favorable.

My hypothesis is that the most effective and perhaps the only way in which we can really help underdeveloped economies develop is to concentrate on an educational process with three major goals: (1) to transmit to and nurture the acceptance and understanding of the people of the developing nation of the crucial importance to development of the research and development process and its application to the local situation; (2) to provide assistance in developing local adaptations of the methods and processes by which meaningful, valid, appropriate answers may be achieved; and (3) to assist in the development of local institutional, political and social arrangements and environments of understanding such that the needed processes by which new knowledge is obtained and put to use may be nurtured and reinforced.

Like Long, I have held this point of view for a long, long time. I have vivid recollections of an answer I received from one officer within AID-Washington, with whom I discussed these matters in 1959 when the Washington State contract was up for renewal. I made what I thought was an eloquent plea in support of at least small research and extension authorizations so that we could function in a manner which we believed to be more appropriate to a university's role in international assistance than simply to assist in the attempt to transmit canned information. The answer was, in effect: "We don't have time for research. Besides, it would be a waste of time. We have the answers. All we really need is a group of good, old-time county agents to get the message over." I hope Dr. Long's report of self-criticism among AID people includes this individual. Perhaps one reason for the reported lack of self-criticism among university employees is that we were too busy criticizing AID to be introspective. If my own and some of my colleagues' experience can be taken as a guide, AID got lots of advice but acted on very little of it. I am delighted, however, with the new turn of thinking as reported by Dr. Long.

How do we evaluate these and alternative answers to the normative questions, "What should technical assistance be?" and What should what it should be, be called? The answer, of course, is by means of research and scholarship. Such evaluations are long overdue.