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CONFERENCE REPORT NO. 1

THE VISITING CRITICS CONFERENCE
APRIL 2-5, 1979
MADISON, WISCONSIN



REGIONAL PLANNING AND AREA DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND PROGRAMS

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MADISON, WISCONSIN

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INTRODUCTION

The visiting critics panel is an important component in the conceptual framework developed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Regional Planning and Area Development Project. The original project proposal to the United States Agency for International Development included the visiting critics panel as a crucial part of the project's design.

The panel was conceptualized as providing a broad sounding board at junctures where conclusions could be drawn from project efforts and as a means for the project's work to be critiqued at important decision points by a diverse group of experts.

The first Visiting Critics Conference was held from April 2-5, 1979, in Madison. The panel was brought together to examine and critique the project's overall goals, direction, and work.

The initial visiting critics panel was composed of the following:

Professor Niles Hansen, Department of Economics, University
of Texas-Austin

Professor Per Holm, Technical University, Stockholm, Sweden

Professor Dennis Rondinelli, Director, Graduate Planning Program,
Syracuse University

Dr. K. Colin Rosser, Director, Development Planning Unit,
University of London

Mr. Harold F. Wise, Planning Consultant, Washington, D.C.

Professor Masahiko Honjo, Director of the U.N. Center for Regional
Development, Nagoya, Japan, also was invited to be on the panel but
was unable to attend the conference. (Comments on the conference by
the visiting critics panel are included in Annex A.)

The conference was planned to provide both formal and informal oppor-
tunities for criticism and discussion and was structured around these
purposes:

- (1) To discuss the project's overall goals and objectives
- (2) To acquaint the visiting critics with project staff, Univer-
sity of Wisconsin faculty involved in the project, and AID
personnel
- (3) To define the role of the visiting critics for the duration
of the project
- (4) To discuss three specific issues
 - the sketch plan approach to regional planning and area
development
 - the training of professional planners of developing countries
 - state-of-the-art research in regional planning and area
development

In addition to work sessions addressing the specific issues listed above,
four program meetings were held with AID personnel that focused on par-
ticular geographical areas of interest to the project--Asia, Latin America,
East Africa, and Tunisia. (A complete list of conference participants
is included in Annex B.)

THE SKETCH PLAN

Professor Leo Jakobson began this session with a brief account of the origins of the sketch plan concept and its refinement through application in research and consulting efforts.

He pointed out that the sketch plan can be defined by its place on three classic conceptual planning continuum: the plan is at mid-point between product-oriented planning and process-oriented planning; it is at mid-point between attempts to plan comprehensively and incrementally; and it is at mid-point between a utopian-normative view of planning and a pragmatic view of planning. The sketch plan is an attempt to span these polarized views of planning, not by becoming a compromised and diluted version of them, but by combining the positive aspects of each.

The first issue that the critics raised was the question of comprehensiveness. Some felt that the issue was sterile, i.e., beating a dead horse. The response was that the legacy of comprehensiveness still affects most planning efforts and that awareness of the issue is a precondition for sound planning.

The attempt to move away from product oriented planning generally was considered as a positive step. The major problem of this kind planning was characterized as "documentalism"--attaching undue importance to the written plan.

An extensive discussion took place that centered on questions of who actually formulates the sketch plan and what values are included. Value biases of three groups were identified: the decision makers, the planners, and the people and the society. Each collection of actors influences the planning-decision-implementation process at different points in time. The key throughout the process is identifying each group's values at the appropriate time.

Several AID staff members expressed concern that the poor are voiceless; their values are rarely injected into policy debate. From the perspective of the poor, they said, planning is something that planners do to people. One of this project's basic aims is to find out the needs and demands of the poor and to search for ways to insure that these considerations are integral parts of the decision process. The sketch plan approach is designed to generate responses simultaneously from the country's decision makers and the people who would be affected by the project's policy initiatives. In the past, the impacts that development efforts have had on growth and change in countries have not always been beneficial to the poor. The sketch plan approach and this project address the decision-making portion of this problem.

Another major theme of discussion was the relationship between planning and various rhythms of decision making. This junctural emphasis in the sketch plan was considered to be a critical element in the efficacy of the concept. There are many time cycles which provide access points for planning: budget cycles, election cycles, even seasonal cycles. The sketch plan approach attempts to force congruence between planning cycles and decision cycles. The result is an opportunistic planning process but one with a higher probability of implementation success than other approaches.

By definition, the sketch plan process utilizes institutions and development strategies that already exist. The critics felt that the paper was weak in relating the sketch plan concept to existing governmental and private structures; since sketch plans are to be used to enhance coordination and effectiveness, more attention needs to be focused on how this will be done. It was noted that the current trend in planning in developing countries is toward facilitating better manage-

ment and administration--a trend illustrated by the recent growth of planning and development authorities. The project's initial involvement is with the Office de Développement de la Tunisie Centrale (ODTC), an organization with the implementation authority that is a crucial precondition in attempting to apply the sketch plan concept in central Tunisia.

It was suggested that development strategies in developing countries should take the form of Ass Backward Planning (ABP). ABP reverses traditional rational planning methodology so that the first consideration is implementation. The sketch plan, it was argued, embraces this notion by focusing simultaneously on three levels: what ought to be, what is, and ascertaining the result--what can be.

The critics then stressed the importance of problem oriented planning and problem specific implementation. The difficulty in setting up a planning concept a priori is that different situations need different amounts of planning and different levels of comprehensiveness. The sketch plan concept attempts to address this dilemma by structuring a planning process that is open ended, opportunistic, disaggregative, and implementable. The critics supported the use of these characteristics but said that the sketch plan would have to be applied in several different settings before any conclusive assessment of the concept could be made.

THE TRAINING MISSION

The conference paper titled "The Training Mission" provided the basis for this session's discussion on the relationship of training to project objectives and on the form and substance of training modules. Professor Jakobson opened the discussion by emphasizing that the training component should be an integral part of other project activities: consultation, applied research, and state-of-the-art work. The training program has been designed to provide personnel in developing countries with knowledge, skills, normative standards and approaches in regional planning, project identification and design, and evaluation. The program is intended to transfer substantive knowledge in subject areas relevant to regional problems in developing countries and to regional analysis and planning.

Jakobson added that the "basic module," which is the initiating module for the entire system, focuses on the sketch plan concept, establishes the system's rationale, explains its methodological requirements, and exemplifies its utility. The importance of this module is based on the firm belief that all project planning and consulting efforts should be grounded in a common understanding of the purpose of planning and of the nature of the methods used to accomplish that purpose. Other training modules would focus on specific methods.

Dan Alesch of the project gave a more detailed presentation of the specific features of the training modules. Overall, the training will have a strong orientation toward practical application and, wherever possible, will be designed to deal with the immediate problems faced by developing countries' personnel in their planning efforts. The modules should be flexible so that they can be expanded or contracted, made applicable to specific problems, transferred to a variety of cultures, and packaged in a useful form for others after the completion of the project.

In general, modules that deal with developing analytic skills will be designed as generic, cross-cultural units of instruction. Modules with objectives that deal primarily with substantive cognitive skills will tend to be country-specific. Modules with appreciation or effective objectives will be mixed units (i.e., containing both generic and country specific materials).

Dennis Rondinelli emphasized that the training modules dealing with decision making should be culture-specific. Others suggested that this might be accomplished by: (1) utilizing a set of local institutions to supervise the training; (2) instituting a "facet scanning" process prior to the training program to examine the existing situation for specific training problems; and (3) tailoring training modules to decision making in local institutions. Norm Nicholson of AID pointed out that the expense and time required for tailored approaches might require either a greater commitment to training from this project or an additional contract to another group to perform this task.

Colin Rosser warned against the emphasis on technical training modules when the solutions to problems in developing countries are frequently a matter of common sense. He suggested that the sequence of training modules be linked with existing knowledge of developing country personnel. He added that the training objective should be designed so that those in the developing program would disseminate the project's conclusions, thereby encouraging a public learning process in a wider context.

One of the problems in building local capacity is the difficulty of agreeing with developing country personnel on appropriate skills. They may want sophisticated quantitative skills in order to increase an agency's prestige, regardless of the suitability of these skills to the local situation. It was suggested that these sophisticated technical skills be

taught if demanded, but only to a limited extent. The personnel should be shown the appropriate use of these techniques and their limited application in problem solving situations. Jakobson suggested that a comparative method of training, one that would expose trainees to situations in several countries, would be useful in acquainting trainees with the limitations of a "bag of techniques."

Several of the critics thought that several substantial issues need to be given more attention. Johnson stressed that specific areas such as range management, water policy, and project design require skills other than those supplied by planning techniques. Nicholson and Rondinelli suggested that specific project design issues could be used as vehicles for teaching planning methods. This approach would facilitate the coordination of training modules with actual problems.

The critics emphasized that the training approach should be developed in a way which would help local personnel to address pressing problems and to engage them in a continuous dialogue between the lessons learned from previous situations and the opportunities for changing existing conditions. Substantive issues could be woven into the problem-solving exercises so that the training modules would be grounded in concrete experiences.

STATE-OF-THE-ART WORK

The purpose of this session was to provide a format for the visiting critics and AID officials to react to the selected state-of-the-art topics and to suggest approaches for evaluating project activities. Ved Prakash opened the discussion by stating the two basic objectives of the state-of-the-art papers: (1) to synthesize knowledge acquired through in-depth involvement in four developing countries and through short-term consulting missions to various countries, and (2) to lead to some intermediate theory building in regional planning and area development.

During the project's first year, state-of-the-art work has been devoted to three basic issues. The first issue deals with finding an alternative approach to the long-range, comprehensive planning strategy which

traditionally has dominated urban and regional planning efforts. In this context, the sketch plan is seen as an alternative which could have wide-ranging possibilities. The second issue involves an attempt to look into the role of regional planning in the development strategies of national and sub-national governments. The third issue deals with the problem of incorporating income distribution into the whole area of project evaluation.

The Structure of State-of-the-Art Work

Colin Kossler noted that an important feature of state-of-the-art work is to contribute to the substantive work done on the frontier of developmental studies. He found it somewhat difficult to understand the logic underlying the selection of the three issues for the project's state-of-the-art work, and suggested dividing the thinking on this subject into three general areas of work. The first are the methodological questions. The discussion on the sketch plan is essentially about methodology.

The second area concerns policy questions and includes such issues as income distribution, rural-urban relationships, etc. As with methodological research, there has been a great deal of work done in this field.

The third general area, concerning organizational and management questions, is very much underexamined. There are three basic issues within this area which could be explored. The first focuses on time. While regional planners characteristically are preoccupied with the question of space, the question of time--lead time, the long and the short term, political time, and annual budget--has been largely ignored in developmental literature. The second issue is the subject of resource mobilization in the field, as opposed to the allocation of resources. The third is what might loosely be called coordination. While coordination could be seen as the central problem of planning and development, the work done in this field is somewhat elementary. The area could include methods such as capital budgeting, control over financial allocations, the role of information systems, and the role of monitoring.

The Regional Planning Approach to Development

Much of the multisectoral planning done on the national level has failed to alleviate the problems with which AID is most concerned: that vast numbers of people in developing countries are excluded from the process of economic change, and in many cases the number of people in absolute poverty is increasing. The goal of regional planning, as Rondinelli pointed out, is to increase the capacity of the poor to participate in economic systems so that they can increase their income and their access to resources. A solid framework is needed which would specify the dynamics of regional development planning which could lead to these objectives.

This framework also should be able to coordinate important elements of resource management, marketing, and local government resource mobilization.

Within this regional planning framework, the focus is on conceptualizing the constraints of the target group but to the region's development for its people. This approach may lead to results that are different from doing sectoral planning and management should be coordinated. The development process are addressed. It is suggested that this need might be met by state-of-the-art papers.

The Definition of the Problem

Nicholson suggested a different approach where the target group is used to define the appropriate question might be more effective to get at the problem of poverty. A number of related issues--from resource management, etc.--could form a state of the art.

Blackton of AID added that the difficulty of identifying the poor. From the experience as Tunisia appears to be solving the problem, regions are not following the same path. The specific contribution that the region can make is to develop a better definition of poverty from the regional perspective.

Starting with the definition of poverty, the focus on the problems of development is on how to generate development for the target group has been defined. The focus should be through direct assistance. The conditions that allow the poor to benefit from an effective form of assistance.

Rosser said that this strategy is more "humanitarian" approaches. The focus is on issues concerning the organization of the economy bypass the notion of poverty. The focus is on society's economic structure. In defining the definition of poor people and developing strategies, he wanted to emphasize the role of making the poor the sole objective.

Theory Building

Hickey of AID questioned whether a particular region's linkages and relationships are unique to the extent that generalizations about development in one region would not be very useful in another region. Rondinelli responded by suggesting that some very strong trends or patterns are discernible in different categories or regions in developing countries. Although regional differences must be considered, it is also important to begin looking for the effectiveness of different approaches in the various preconditions or conditions found in developing areas. Questions will always emerge regarding the limitations of any case study of development in any one country or region, but these questions should not preclude the usefulness of generalizations about the development process.

Project Evaluation

Rondinelli pointed to two levels of evaluation necessary due to the different types of activities. One level would directly evaluate whether the University of Wisconsin project is performing specified tasks and doing them well. A direct evaluation might consider whether training is having the appropriate effect on those selected for training; the kinds of training materials are building the skills that the programs intended; the consulting activities are helping the client; the state-of-the-art papers are defining the problems and providing useful information.

The second level of evaluation would be concerned with the effects of project activities on the particular target groups or areas that AID has defined as being primary beneficiaries. The first level of evaluation can be done during the life of the project; the second level will take place some time after the project's completion to assess if the project's activities have brought about socio-economic changes in the beneficiary group in the longer range.

While the second level of evaluation is ultimately more important, it is much more difficult to do. Intervening factors, such as interrelationships with other ongoing projects and changing political conditions, may have substantial impacts on this longer range consideration. It may not be wise to have the same evaluators doing each of the evaluations.

Rosser pointed out that it is very important to involve host country officials in this second level of evaluation. This involvement could serve a number of functions. First, it would avoid the closed, introverted style of evaluation which has been typical of AID projects. Second, it would help in tackling the difficult problem of evaluating the extent to which institutional capacity has been strengthened. Since the style of this project is advisory, throwing a great emphasis on collaborative effort, it is important to attempt to evaluate the success

of that collaboration. Third, organizing evaluations to involve host country professionals is one way of disseminating the project's thinking within the host country. Fourth, a substantial cadre of highly competent professionals is available to help in the evaluation process. It is a great mistake to regard the countries as deserts of expertise. These countries have many very skilled professionals, some with international reputations, who ought to be involved in the evaluation.

Time Considerations

The conventional wisdom that the test of planning is in the implementation is only partially true. Blackton noted that the projects which still appear to have been successful after twenty years are not the ones which merely achieved their objectives; usually these projects created a cadre of manpower who went on to work on other development projects. This points to the importance of germinating ideas among people, which takes time, sometimes a long time.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A

FROM THE OFFICE OF **HAROLD F. WISE** *A.I.P. Planning Consultant*

Professor Leo Jakobson
Regional Planning and Area Development Project
University of Wisconsin
Room 101
905 University Avenue
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

Dear Leo:

Here are some brief notes on the discussions that the visiting critics panel held in Madison last week.

Our primary conclusion is that the role and functions of the panel should be determined by project management depending on their needs at any given point.

These follow a series of suggestions for the consideration of the project management regarding how the panel might function.

The panel should operate as a collective group and view the project as a whole. Final responsibility for the project and its operations, of course, resides with the project management.

Given the projects primary objectives of: 1) doctrine and methodology development, 2) institutional and capacity building and 3) dealing with sectoral matters such as the needs of the rural poor, soil and water, infrastructure needs and payoffs and the like, members of the panel can be viewed as information resources in certain broad functional areas. The panel felt that the following types of assignments might be appropriate and useful to the project:

- o organization of the project - Per Holm
- o applied research - Niles Hansen
- o training - Colin Rosser
- o state-of-the-art - Dennis Rondinelli
- o institution building and consulting - Hal Wise

FROM THE OFFICE OF HAROLD F. WISE A.L.P. *Planning Consultant*

We suggest that as the project gets better organized and as milestones are established, we could be brought in at given points to be determined by project management, where the panel could make the most valuable contribution to the work. In other words, the visiting critics should work within and respond to the rhythm and flow of the work.

We suggest that well in advance of each panel meeting, the panel be given adequate documentation to bring us up to date on project status. We further suggest that project management should formulate and pose a series of questions to the panel around areas of concern to management that would warrant much more direction. In this way the panel could make positive and focused contributions.

While site visits might be desirable, we feel the panel - project management meetings should not occur in the country where the project is operating.

The panel should be given the opportunity, prior to meetings with project management, to meet in "executive session", as we did in Madison. We could exchange views on the questions posed and perhaps add some additional questions of our own.

While not specifying a desirable length of time for such meetings, the panel feels that meetings should be shorter than in Madison, and much more intense. Otherwise there is a danger that the momentum of discussion can be lost.

On the questions of expanding the panel we suggest that this be done on an ad hoc basis, at least for a while. If experts are desired from developing countries, they should not be from the country in which the project is working. If substantive expertise is felt to be needed, such as in agricultural economics, this too should be done on an ad hoc basis. However, we feel that the panel should be viewed as bringing general constructive criticism of project organization and work as opposed to bringing specific expertise.

Incidentally Colin Rosser has many contacts with experts from developing countries and could supply names and recommendations if it is desired.

The panel feels an obligation to give to the project a written record of its deliberations, conclusions and recommendations.

We want to commend the project people we met with in Madison for their lack of a defensive attitude. This permits a happy spirit of constructive criticism to operate.

FROM THE OFFICE OF HAROLD F. WISE A.I.P. *Planning Consultant*

Should project management desire for the next meeting to focus on Tunisia, a sight visit to the Kasserine area might be in order. Should such be the case, Colin Rosser suggests that the panel meeting with project management be held in Malta, because "it is close to Tunisia, it is English speaking and it is cheap! "

I believe I have covered everything in my notes. I will send copies of this report to the other members of the panel so that they can fill in areas of concern that I may have missed or misinterpreted.

I am sure that I reflect the views of the panel in offering sincere congratulations to you and your colleges in the award of this work to the University of Wisconsin. You have every reason to be proud. The project is well conceived and I am sure you will be making a major contribution to A.L.D.'s work in the developing countries of the world.

We are looking forward to being a part of your effort.

Sincerely,



Harold F. Wise, A.I.P.
Planning Consultant

cc: Hansen
Holm
Honjo
Rondinelli
Rosser

ANNEX B
VISITING CRITICS CONFERENCE
PARTICIPANTS

Visiting Critics Panel

Professor Niles Hansen, Department of Economics, University of Texas-Austin
Professor Per Holm, Department of Regional Planning, Technical University,
Stockholm, Sweden
Professor Dennis Rondinelli, Director, Graduate Planning Program, Syracuse
University
Dr. K. Colin Rosser, Director, Development Planning Unit, University of
London
Mr. Harold F. Wise, Planning Consultant, Washington, D.C.

United States Agency for International Development/Washington

Mr. Aaron Benjamin, Latin American Bureau
Mr. John Blackton, Near East Bureau
Dr. Gerald Hickey, Asia Bureau
Mr. William Johnson, African Bureau
Dr. Grace Langley, Near East Bureau
Dr. Norman Nicholson, Rural Development Office

University of Wisconsin

Professor Peter Amato, Urban and Regional Planning
Associate Professor Stephen Born, Urban and Regional Planning
Professor Gordon Chesters, Water Resources
Professor Dennis Dresang, Political Science
Professor Lincoln Engelbert, Soil Science
Mr. Charles Engman, Environmental Studies
Dr. Edward Fallon, Land Tenure Center
Professor Wilford Gardner, Soil Science
Professor Irwin Garfinkel, Social Work
Professor Duncan Harkin, Agricultural Economics
Professor Donald Kanel, Land Tenure Center
Dr. Concepcion Lee, Anthropology
Professor Marvin Miracle, Agricultural Economics
Professor Gerald Nadler, Industrial Engineering
Dr. Christine Obbo, Anthropology
Professor Raymond Penn, Emeritus, Agricultural Economics
Professor Ira Robinson, Urban and Regional Planning
Professor Aidan Southall, Anthropology
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