

TEAM EVALUATION REPORT OF PROJECT #931-0064

(RSSA USDA 3-74)

Background:

Project #931-0064, Agricultural Information and Related Services, was evaluated on September 20, 1978. The team was composed of these professionals:

Team Leader: ASIA/TR, Cal Martin
Team Members: Jill Merrick, Director,
Clearinghouse on Development Communications
John Hafenrichter, DS/DIU/DI
Susan Walls, DS/MGT
Dan Blake, DS/PO

Other participants/observers present were:

William Hoffnagle, USDA, OICD
Harry Mattox, Acting Asst. Director
Program Support
Patricia Wetmore, USDA, IDS
Maury D. Brown, DS/DIU
David Donovan, DS/DIU
Robert Gaul, DS/DIU
William Vogelsang, DS/DIU
Project Manager: Earle Lawrence, DS/DIU
David Rhoad, DS/PO

The Scope of Work (Attachment A) for this evaluation was unanimously approved at a review session in the Program Office, chaired by DS/PO, Charles Molfetto. James Erickson, DS/PO/RES, Dan Blake, DS/PO, David Rhoad, DS/PO, John Hafenrichter, DS/DIU, and Earle Lawrence, DS/DIU, attended the review.

The Program Office reviewers discussed the issue of evaluation of on-going activities such as this USDA RSSA which provide a service support program as opposed to undertaking actual development projects. This distinction is important since -- in this case -- USDA carries out work and activities under this RSSA which AID and its overseas missions expressly request it to carry out. The reviewers felt it would be inconsistent for an evaluation team to ask USDA to justify those actions in a broad development context. That type of evaluation, it was agreed, should occur at the AID project management level where program design and scope of work determinations are made.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this evaluation was to focus on the current (RSSA) scope of work (See Appendix A), USDA outputs, and six or eight performance issues related to project design. Discussion ranged over all levels of project impact but most recommendations were confined to actions which were within the power of the USDA workers to adopt under their present mandate and funding level.

USDA PRESENTATION:

Harry Mattox, USDA, OICD, gave a brief overview and history of the project. He outlined some predecessor activities carried out under information components of early Technical Cooperation and Support agreements between AID and the USDA in the early 1950's.

The present activities were projectized in 1974 and the original Scope of Work was broader than the present one which offers two primary services: (1) a response and referral activity to field requests for technical information from USAID Missions, AID/W and appropriate host country institutions and (2) on-call technical information and utilization support services.

Ms. Patricia Wetmore, USDA/IDS, the RSSA technical information officer and manager of the technical inquiry service, explained the procedures she utilizes to answer information requests.

Procedures vary from a simple book purchase to searches of the worldwide literature. Ms. Wetmore explained that she consults with USDA personnel and U.S. Land Grant University experts through informal inquiries rather than through a formal bureaucratic mechanism.

Project Outputs documented in several annual reports were reviewed. Data from 1978 are as follows:

I. STATISTICAL REPORT OF INFORMATION SERVICES--FISCAL YEAR 1978

CLIENTS SERVED*

USAID Missions.....	237
AID/W Offices.....	331
AID Contractors/Grantees.....	133
International Organizations.....	5
LDC's: Individuals and Institutions.....	60
DC's: Individuals and Institutions.....	28
U.S. Government (including Peace Corps).....	<u>115</u>
TOTAL.....	909

NATURE OF RESPONSES

Reference Services (phone, correspondence, --
book order requests)..... 731

Information and Analysis Packages..... 76

Literature Searches:

 Manual..... 198

 Bibliographic Data Base Files..... 138

Materials Used.....4177

*Excluded are statistics for distribution of AID and USDA/AID
R&D reports.

Ms. Wetmore reported on a TDY, funded under a separate ROCAP RSSA with the USDA, which took her to Central America in July and August of 1978. As a result of the briefings she gave at Missions in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala, the inquiry service is receiving more information requests and more highly-sophisticated inquiries.

Issues:

The Team discussed all of the issues listed in the Evaluation Team Scope of Work (Attachment A; Section J; Page 4) and several others brought up by individual members and observers.

1. Growth of Service. The field inquiry service faces the dilemma of keeping labor-intensive resources in line with field demand while sustaining a balanced growth. It is felt that an over stimulation of demand could "swamp" the service and reduce its capability to respond. At the same time, field people need this service and greater awareness should be created at the Missions.

The evaluation team discussed this issue at length. The dilemma was acknowledged as a real one and typically faced by information organizations. The team suggested the ideal of a "balanced evolutionary growth as a difficult but attainable goal.

Recommendations: In light of all the growth-of-service considerations, a targeted promotional effort was recommended. Specifically, it was suggested that:

- a.) An updated service announcement be drafted up by DIU and sent to all mission food and agriculture officers via circular airgram.
- b.) DIU staff include an explanation of the USDA inquiry service whenever they undertake briefings.
- c.) USDA RSSA staff continue briefings on their service whenever they have an opportunity.

- d.) USDA RSSA staff and the AID project manager should engage in more AID/W awareness activities such as the IDI briefings on the RSSA service arranged by the ASIA bureau.

2. Quality of Service. This topic was covered fully by the evaluation team and the discussion frequently returned to questions related to this broad topic. It was generally agreed that evaluation of this type of service is extremely difficult, but USDA should be trying harder to obtain information both as an aid to improving their service and to meet their accountability obligations. Recommendations were:

- a.) USDA should make an attempt to influence the quality of requests by providing Mission food and agriculture officers with the request form; the request form should incorporate "key words" and other search aids; the USDA staff should stress the importance of full information for requests at their briefings of AID personnel.
- b.) Close attention should be paid to evaluation. The team felt that an open-ended survey of Missions would probably not yield useful data. However, interviews of field users on Washington service tours or visits would provide some needed feedback. It was felt that a well-planned visit of the director of the inquiry service to Missions could be an effective means of evaluation.
- c.) USDA should try to gather more data on the nature of inquiries and the ultimate use of the information provided. Moreover, USDA should more carefully analyze the data they presently have. Incidence of use should be broken down by regions, Missions and perhaps some pertinent subject matter patterns as they develop.

3. Project Documentation. No specific recommendations were made regarding this question.

4. Access to USDA Expertise and Resources. Ms. Wetmore explained that she informally taps USDA and Land Grant University professional expertise and no formal mechanism has been introduced. The evaluation team endorsed this approach.

5. Project Continuation. The evaluation team agreed that the project should be continued.

6. Private Versus Government Contractor. The evaluation team felt that it would be very difficult and costly for a private firm to gain access to USDA internal and outreach resources and to duplicate that Department's linkages with Land Grant Universities.

Recommendation: The project continue under the USDA and that private contracting be ruled out for this particular service.

7. USDA/DI Interaction. Evaluation Team Leader Cal Martin pointed out that field people making requests of the USDA for technical information could often probably benefit from the project information available from the documentation and information division of DIU and vice versa.

Recommendation: Both DI and USDA should examine requests carefully to see if the context or stated use reveals a need for both experiential and technical background information. The two services should maintain frequent and regular contact.

Summary:

The evaluation team felt that the USDA RSSA was carrying out its work satisfactorily and the project should be continued.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

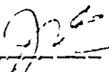
TO : DS/DIU, Earl Lawrence

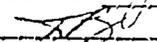
DATE: September 25, 1978

FROM : DS/PO, Charles Molfetto 

SUBJECT: "Agricultural Information and Related Services," Project # 931-0054

We have reviewed subject and concur with its implementation.

Clearance: DS/PO/RES, J. Erickson 

DS/PO, D. Blake 



SCOPE OF WORK FOR TEAM EVALUATION OF

PROJECT #931-0064

(RSSA USDA 3-74)

A. Project Name and Number:

Agricultural Information and Related Services. Project #931-0064.
Funding Level:

	\$
7/1/73 to 6/30/74	211,531
7/1/74 to 6/30/75	296,101
7/1/75 to 6/30/76	239,000
7/1/76 to 9/31/76	60,000
10/1/76 to 9/31/77	120,000
10/1/77 to 9/30/78	182,000
10/1/78 to 9/30/79	245,000 (Authorized)

B. Implementing Organization:

Office of International Cooperation and Development -- United States Department of Agriculture.

C. Purpose of Team Evaluation:

1. To examine changes in the scope of work throughout the evolution of the project and determine appropriateness of present approaches.

2. To measure effectiveness of past and present services.

3. To fulfill project authorization requirement stipulated by the Assistant Administrator of the Development Support Bureau.

D. Members of Evaluation Team:

1. Team Leader: ASIA/TR, Cal Martin, Senior Agriculturist with many years of experience with AID, will provide solid direction to the evaluation team and judge the project from the Regional Bureau/Mission point of view.

2. Team Member: Jill Merrick, Director, Clearinghouse on Development Communications, Washington, D. C. Ms. Merrick, an accomplished journalist and development communicator, will evaluate the program in light of her own extensive experience of supervising an inquiry service which caters to LDC clientele.

3. Team Member: DS/DIU/DI, John Hafenrichter, Documentation and Information Chief. Mr. Hafenrichter will brief the evaluation team on the use of information consultants obtained under the RSSA. He will evaluate project performance from a professional librarian point of view.

4. Team Member: DS/MGT, Susan Walls, an experienced management expert. Ms. Walls will evaluate the program in light of AID Management considerations in accord with the AA/DS, May 16, directive.

5. Team Member: (DS/PO). One member to be designated from the Development Support Bureau Program Office to evaluate the program from the Planning Division perspective in accord with the AA/DS, May 16, directive.

E. Other Participants/Observers:

1. USDA, OICD, Harry Mattox, Acting Assistant Director, Program Support, has had long-term management responsibility for the RSSA and handles recruitment and contracting for special consultants. Mr. Mattox will brief the evaluation team on the history and evolution of the RSSA.

2. USDA, IDS, Ms. Patricia Wetmore, Technical Information Officer. Ms. Wetmore manages the technical inquiry service and handles acquisitions, distribution and special services requests under the RSSA. Ms. Wetmore will brief the evaluation team on present activities.

3. AID/DS/DIU/U, Earle Lawrence, Project Manager. Mr. Lawrence will brief the evaluation team on current utilization projects being implemented under the RSSA.

4. AID/DS/PO, David Rhoad, former project manager of the RSSA. Mr. Rhoad will give the evaluation team a brief summary of the special projects undertaken under the RSSA and be available as a knowledge resource.

5. The following members of DS/DIU staff with an interest in this project:

Maury D. Brown
David Donovan
Robert Gaul
Lee White
William Vogelsang

F. Date and Place of Evaluation:

September 20, 1978
Room 510
Pomponio Plaza (SA-14)
Rosslyn, Virginia

G. Cost Analysis:

No direct costs will be incurred.

H. Project Background:

This RSSA began under the auspices of the Office of Agriculture in 1974. It was evaluated in 1975 and the scope of work was altered significantly in 1976 when the utilization group (then: TA/PPU/EUI) took over management of the project.

Predecessor activities to this project were carried out since the mid-1950's under T.C. and S (Technical Cooperation and Support) agreements between AID and USDA. These blanket agreements contained information components which varied in complexity and purpose.

I. Measurement of Progress:

No project paper and Log Frame Matrix has been officially submitted for this project. A Matrix was apparently developed and used for the 1975 review and 1976 Project Appraisal Report (PAR), however, it is out-of-date at the present time.

This evaluation will focus on the effectiveness of the RSSA in carrying out the current Scope of Work:

I. Response/Referral Activity

- a. Carry out searches (bibliographic, literature and data bank and from other sources) based on requests from USAIDs, AID/W, and from appropriate host country institutions.
- b. Refer to appropriate subject matter specialists within the USDA-land grant system for specific response to any requests from USAIDs or AID/W which need such treatment.
- c. Respond to routine requests for copies of printed materials in the form to be determined by DS/DIU.

II. On-Call Technical Information and Utilization Support Services

- a. Purchase specific publications related to food production or nutrition for AID/W and USAIDs as requested, and carry out necessary distribution.
- b. Assist in production of technical publications or utilization materials as requested by DS/DIU and carry out necessary distribution.
- c. Assist in personnel recruitment and contracting whenever required for special information management or planning activities as directed by DS/DIU. Such activities may include editing, writing, revising of technical publications, preparation of distribution lists, and dissemination.

- d. Provide back-up bibliographic and information management services to the DS Bureau Information Cluster staff and information center as requested by DS/DIU.

J. Problems and Issues:

1. Growth of Service. The field response service is now confronting the institution-building dilemma faced by many reference centers, clearing houses and other information services -- how to keep labor-intensive resources in balance with demand.

- a. What outreach mechanisms can USDA employ to advertise its service without allowing demand to outstrip response capability?
- b. How can USDA anticipate demand for the service?
- c. How can requests be prioritized?

2. Quality of Service. What evaluative mechanisms can be incorporated into operations to routinely assess impact and appropriateness of service?

3. Project Paper/Matrix. Should this RSSA retain the flexible, evolutionary pattern which has characterized its development over the years? Would the project benefit from the discipline imposed by current documentation requirements?

4. Access to USDA Expertise and Resources. The RSSA provides a central point by which AID and ATD Missions, in particular, can capitalize on the wealth of in-house resources available within USDA. Can the efficiency of this informal mechanism be increased through more stringent bureaucratic channels?

5. Project Continuation. This project is funded on an annual "need-justified" basis. Presumably, there will be a continuation of the need for technical agricultural information at the mission level. Is this project seen as the most effective mechanism for meeting that need on a continuing basis?

K. Documents:

While no project paper is available, the current PAF (Project Authorization and Request for Allotment of Funds), PIO/T's (Project Implementation Order/Technical Services), for previous years, annual reports and the 1976 PAR (Project Appraisal Report) will be supplied. In addition, some USDA documentation will be submitted to the review team.

L. Agenda:

Evaluation Session-September 20, 1978.

Evaluation Report-September 22, 1978.