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PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION

OF VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT CORPS

An Evaluation Report Submitted

to Volunteer Development Corps and

The Agency for International Development

by

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September 3, 1981 Arlington, Virginia

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Executive Summary

Volunteer Development Corps (VDC) is a private, non-profit organization providing short-term technical help to cooperatives and associated government agencies in developing countries. VDC completed 200 short-term projects from the start of field operations in 1971, through March, 1981, these well distributed including 47 countries in all regions. This evaluation included interviews with representatives of cooperatives, government agencies, and AID Missions in relation to 18 projects in the Philippines, Botswana, and Bolivia, review of VDC files on about 30 projects completed, and 20 not implemented, and discussions with VDC staff and selected AID officers.

The VDC program is generally sound. Project development, volunteer recruitment, and the actual field execution of projects have been superior. Field representatives have identified an ample number of potential projects, and have assisted potential clients in reaching sharper definition of topics suitable for short-term assistance by a qualified person. In many cases this discussion leads cooperative leaders to recognize issues and needs in a form they can solve themselves. Many topics and entire proposed projects are dropped as a result of these discussions.

VDC has recruited highly experienced volunteers, commonly retired from careers at senior levels in US cooperatives or other fields associated with project requirements. These volunteers have performed in an almost uniformly superior manner. Field respondents commend their ability to address their scope of work, to work out necessary adjustments, their attitude toward completing their tasks, their overall qualifications, and their recommendations. Most recommendations have been implemented. The qualifying and rare adverse comments received or observed in VDC files are scattered and generally minor.

VDC policy is to complete a field evaluation eight to fifteen months after project completion. These evaluations cover major aspects of project execution, and actions on recommendations. They appear candid, and track closely with results of field interviews in this evaluation.

VDC has been implementing less than two-thirds of the requests, with many reasons for inaction or refusal of the remainder. VDC has been responsive, and past refusals are not criticized.

VDC has adopted a plan for sponsorship by other U.S. cooperative systems, joining the sponsors in its financial support, in policy making, and in specific operational steps. While not all the other cooperative organizations supported in part by AID grants have entered into this sponsorship arrangement, the present situation has proven workable.

The VDC program is linked favorably with several interests of most U.S. policy makers. VDC cultivates such positive interest by arranging briefings by returned volunteers with their Senators and Representative, or with their staff.

Instances where VDC projects have produced minimum or doubtful results are considered primarily associated with adverse conditions external to project execution itself. It is proposed that projects can be further identified at the time of project approval, to distinguish between those likely to produce a major impact and those less likely to do so.

A process of more critical pre-project assessment is proposed. The primary step in this process is preparation of a "Project Potential Appraisal" on the cooperative, its situation, and expected results of the project. In addition to these project appraisals, a selective and rather informal process of country appraisals and inter-country functional appraisal is recommended. The proposed Project Potential Appraisal, amplified by country and functional appraisals when available, should become the focus of project selection discussions.

A strengthened evaluation process will in time yield much of the information needed for selection, and for continued project monitoring. Thus, a few additional topics are proposed for evaluations. Some of them correspond with material in the Project Potential Appraisals, providing comparison of results with expectations.

Other recommendations are minor.

VDC should plan internal evaluations that will as nearly as possible satisfy the needs of AID. The next substantial evaluation should be in two years, when actions based on this evaluation may have produced results.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION OF VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT CORPS

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Introduction

Volunteer Development Corps (VDC) is a private, non-profit organization providing short-term technical help to cooperatives and government agencies serving cooperatives in developing countries, at their request. VDC completed 200 such short-term projects since the start of field operations in 1971 through March 31, 1981. Monetary support is primarily from the Agency for International Development (AID), with smaller contributions by U.S. cooperative organizations and by the cooperatives served. Contributions in kind are substantial, particularly the services of the volunteers themselves, who receive no pay. The cooperatives served provide local transportation, office support, interpreters as required, etc. VDC directors serve without compensation.

The AID grants are provided through FPVA/PVC. Grant Amendment 30, of January 2, 1981 provided that VDC in consultation with AID shall provide for an evaluation of a sample of VDC projects in the field. I was selected as the evaluation consultant with the concurrence of FPVA/PVC. An outline of the evaluation was jointly prepared; and this report was prepared as a result of the evaluation. Work was executed from mid-May through the date of the report, including work in Washington, D.C. and travel to the Philippines, Botswana, and Bolivia in July.

The issues outlined were extensive and varied, as will be observed. The original AID request, and discussion with the AID representative indicated that emphasis should be placed on project evaluation in the field. Analysis of the several policy and procedural topics had therefore to receive less emphasis.

Two preceding external evaluations of the VDC program should be noted. Robert Hubbell completed an evaluation of VDC alone in 1974, when the program was of course young. Then in 1980, AID contracted with Development Associates (DA) to review all six cooperative development organizations supported in part by AID institutional support grants.1/ The Hubbell report seems remarkably insightful, considering the then early stage of the VDC program. DA also provided a broadly solid review of VDC. The point at this time affecting the preferred presentation of this report is that neither Hubbell or DA raised issues critical of the general thrust and organization of the VDC program.

Additionally, the AID monitor of the VDC grant advised the evaluator at the outset that he was not aware of fundamental criticism of VDC. This evaluation was thus designed as a relatively modest effort, suited to the preceding conditions and views applied to a relatively small-scale AID

1/ Development Associates, "Assessment of Cooperative Development Organizations," Arlington, VA. 1980.

activity ($528,536 in 1980).2/ The intention was perceived as a further inquiry stressing field evaluation and providing some combination of further support of the program and possible criticism, or more likely, recommendations for refinement and strengthening of the program. Anticipating the findings, the latter proved the case.

The evaluation effort concentrated on field review of selected projects and review of file materials on these and other projects. The topics covered in field interviews followed the agreed scope of work, and will be evident in the following section. Review of files had a similar emphasis plus providing information on the initial development of projects, the selection of volunteers, their experience, their briefing, logistic support, and reports or their summaries. The value of file material is reinforced by the extent to which it presents a picture conforming closely with that from field interviews.

The information employed thus encompasses field interviews of clients in 18 projects, related government officials, officers in three AID Missions, VDC file material, extensive conferences with VDC staff, and interviews with selected AID staff. Review of project files included about 30 that were implemented and 20 that were not, plus additional inquiries that did not reach the application stage. This process is considered to provide information representative of the VDC program and its administration. Both VDC and AID representatives reviewed an initial draft, resulting in correction of some errors that were noted, and adjustments in response to additional information and viewpoints presented. Any remaining errors of fact, and the interpretations and conclusions in this report are of course the responsibility of the evaluator.

While the body of the report will follow the several items of the scope of work, conscious effort will be made to stress basic elements of the VDC program. Ancillary and supportive policies and activities should be viewed as such. Basic elements are:

A. Project development
B. Project approval and volunteer recruitment
C. Project implementation
D. Evaluation

There will be general discussion of these topics as a system, leading to primary recommendations, following treatment of scope of work items. Again anticipating the findings, primary recommendations involve the evaluation process with suggestions relating to project approval (selection).

Field Examination of Projects

Specific efforts were made to secure field information on six projects in the Philippines, five in Botswana, and seven in Bolivia. These efforts were quite successful in most cases, but in a few instances, individuals who had worked directly with the VDC volunteer were not located. It is vital to include these cases in the discussion.

2/ The evaluation was estimated to require seven weeks of work, including travel.

Oral comments about the response of volunteers to the established scope of work, and project purpose, were uniformly favorable. Respondents stated that volunteers did indeed work on what was requested. It may be noted that VDC project files reveal somewhat more adaptations and in-process variations than the memory and/or tact of field respondents brought out.3/

For example in Botswana, assistance on accounting controls for inventory was a key part of one request, but on arrival, the Cooperative Union already had purchased an accounting system for this purpose. The volunteer worked on other accounting topics agreed to require attention. Major adjustments were required in two other cases, when managers were terminated during the project's course.

Such changes seem inevitable, and the adjustments reflect favorably on the adaptability and breadth of experience of volunteers. The adjustments evidently were made smoothly and with at least sufficient understanding, that respondents in some cases do not recall the adjustment process, so long after the fact.

As the field interviews progressed, increasing attention was given to personal and working relations of volunteers with officials and staff of the client cooperatives and agencies. The process of adjusting or tailoring the project scope of work on the spot is considered a major test. As stated, some respondents do not recall adjustments (including instances where VDC files do so indicate). More frequently, there was some memory of adjustments, and when asked about the process, all indicated enthusiastically that this was very easy to accomplish with the volunteer.

The VDC project file, in one case, indicated that certain representatives of one cooperative stated that a volunteer had not sufficiently completed one part of his task. This key officer was absent, during the present evaluation, and no person present was aware a question had been raised. The situation is of further interest in program evaluation, however. One aspect of the problems addressed involved recommendations relating to the extent and form of mechanization of an accounting system. The volunteer found the cooperative had experienced some managerial turmoil, and management was changed. Considering the uncertainty this suggested, the volunteer suggested delay in arriving at specific recommendations on the one topic.

As events developed, solid management was restored, a path of growth continued, accounting needs expanded, and now two years later, a new computerized system is expected momentarily to be installed. This evaluator believes the volunteer exercised sound analysis and judgement, considering the facts he observed.

Field respondents with one exception believed the volunteer had worked on topics of major importance at that time to the cooperative or agency.4/

3/ References are made throughout this section to information noted in VDC files.

4/ This one negative response may be discounted because the respondent was newly appointed when the project was implemented, and he clearly had a partial memory.

Unfortunately, this topic and responses bear the risk of being somewhat self-serving for the clients and also volunteers. Few persons will admit to an exercise in trivia. The evaluator's own judgement is that the scope of all the requests involved in the projects reviewed was sufficient to justify the VDC volunteer.

The outcome of the Botswana request including inventory controls may be marginal in significance. The topic the volunteer primarily addressed, records of fixed assets, and depreciation, perhaps scarcely justified a highly experienced consultant from the U.S. The cooperative and not VDC may be faulted in this case for action removing a major part of the need for consultancy without advising VDC. Such slippage in actions and communication are fairly common in technical assistance activities, unfortunately.

To conclude this discussion of the importance of the projects, two of VDC's policies relating to acceptance of projects may be mentioned.5/ VDC will accept an application (a) "That seems likely to enhance economic development through the organization and growth of cooperatives, which at least in the forseeable future can balance income and outgo, pay their debts, and put or keep money in their members' pockets," and (b) "That relates to a developing country..." The overall subject of criteria for accepting projects will be discussed later in the report. Here, the omission is noted, of explicit consideration of the degree of seriousness or urgency of the issue(s), complexity in terms of requiring application of a high level of skill and experience, scale of cooperative operations, and national availability of required expertise. These appear to be some relevant considerations in weighing the adequacy of VDC requests, though rigid rules on these topics probably would be poor policy. The low cost of VDC service to the client presents a real challenge to VDC in decisions concerning acceptance.6/ A financially weak cooperative is particularly tempted to request this assistance which it cannot afford at full cost even if locally available.7/ While VDC has through most of its history had sufficient resources to meet most valid and serious requests, an increasing selectivity may now be justified and even required, in various aspects.

The determination and appraisal of the implementation of recommendations, and their effect is at the heart of the field evaluation. This turns out to be a largely favorable story. The implications of some cases are considered complex. A few notes on each project are justified.

Philippines

1. (VDC No. 93) Food wholesale system, 1976: No direct data were located. Recommendations may have helped discourage irrational actions, by outlining various requirements to achieve success.

5/ Volunteer Development Corps, "Policies," 3 pp. 25 November 1980.

6/ Cooperatives and agencies normally contribute $500 toward overall VDC program expenses, provide local transportation, office space, interpreters, etc.

7/ There were indications in some interviews suggesting a contrasting and very positive hypothesis. A relatively strong, well managed cooperative may make the most effective use of a volunteer, therefore be strongly satisfied, and inclined to submit further requests as new issues are identified.

2. (VDC No. 106) Food wholesale system, 1977: Limited memory and data. There is definite indication the recommendations helped avoid irrational actions, again by indicating requirements for the success of particular proposals.

3. (VDC No. 154) Cooperative supermarket, 1979: Conceivably, advice postponed failure of one market and/or transferred helpfully to main store. Depth of problems forced closure of branch and survival of main store now may be in doubt. (At least partial implementation, but doubtful benefits.)

4. (VDC No. 156) Provincial consumer cooperative federation (Bacolod City), 1979: Operations revived from deep problems. Respondent gives major credit to volunteer.

5. (VDC No. 177) Cooperative banking, 1979: Recommendations nearly all implemented. Tangible results minimal to date however, since few loans have been extended.

6. (VDC No. 224) Cooperative housing, 1979: Proposals were carried into draft policies. These are not finally adopted, 2 years later. No tangible results can be credited.

Botswana

7. (VDC No. 104) Selibe Phikwe consumer cooperative operations, 1976: No personal memory located in Gaborone. There is very tangible information showing that the cooperative survived drastic problems. It may be that, following the volunteer's report government and cooperative union recognized the depth of problems as outlined, and then took sufficient actions to overcome them. VDC files support this.

8. (VDC No. 105) Cooperative union accounting, 1976: No personal memory, except by third level staff person. Accountant describes a fixed assets records system consistent with recommendations, but this is not current. Request stressed inventory controls, but Union took other action prior to volunteer. VDC files indicate positive actions.

9. (VDC No. 135) Cooperative union accounting system, 1978: Most recommendations implemented. Cannot measure effect. Accounting needs continue to increase. New system about to be initiated. Volunteer criticized by some for failure to recommend a mechanized system. "Work incomplete." (See earlier comments.)

10. (VDC No. 246) Transportation, 1980: Nearly all recommendations implemented. Results considered excellent. Followup requested.

11. (VDC No. 314) Cooperative banking, 1981: Recommendations are reflected in actions moving through Ministry of Agriculture to Ministry of Finance. Cannot measure final "results" yet, but speed and extent of use of recommendations in administrative actions is highly positive.

Bolivia

12. (VDC No. 188) Rural electric system, engineering and policies relating to expansion, 1979: Most recommendations implemented. Results considered valuable in all areas; substantial tangible results.

13. (VDC No. 189) Rural electric system, socio-economic data for planning expansion, and later evaluation, 1979: Data compiled considered valuable both to client, and also other cooperatives and regional agencies.

14. (VDC No. 306) Rural electric system, analysis of data processing needs and operation of data processing unit, 1980: Volunteer confirmed tentative choice of equipment; recommendations about training and organization of unit largely implemented. Cooperative pleased with volunteer, straining to adapt to rapid growth in operations. A solid data processing system is vital. Volunteer returned in 1981 to advise on further expansion.

15. (VDC No. 211) Insurance cooperative, analysis of operations, management, growth potentials, 1980: Some recommendations adopted, some modified, some under further consideration, some declined. Cooperative has requested followup visit of volunteer.

16. (VDC No. 55) Savings and credit cooperative, analysis of proposed commercial operations, 1974: Findings considered valuable to cooperative, but expansion into lines studies not undertaken. Continued possibility exists. Cooperative probably was not ready for definitive planning and action at time of project.

17. (VDC No. 172) Savings and credit cooperative, analysis of potential effects of inflation and changes in exchange rates, 1979: Management considers analysis and recommendations valuable. Board of directors has required time to absorb analysis, with continuing information program. There is progress. Followup visit requested.

18. (VDC No. 295) Savings and credit cooperative, analysis of printing plant operations, 1981: Recommendations considered valuable, and many already implemented; some under consideration; a few tabled.

Discussion

Results in the Philippines may be considered broadly as doubtful or only preventive in as many as three of the six projects. Two may be considered to produce positive results, and one still is pending after two years. Efforts in three cases to help build a consumer cooperative system in Manila, and to link it with a farmer marketing system have yielded nothing likely to endure. Additional projects have related to these topics.

Results in Botswana may be considered positive or probably very favorable in all five projects.

Results in Bolivia are considered very positive in six of seven projects reviewed. The positive cases include one involving data collection, not directly including recommendations. The exception (uncertain results) case may also be valuable if it helped prevent initiation of unsound actions. Knowledge of such processes and decisions in the context of the proposed actions was not located.

No reason has been observed to credit greater skills and performance of volunteers in the more clearly positive cases, or in Bolivia and Botswana generally over the Philippines. Also, there has been a comparable and typical record of somewhat frequent staff changes in key positions in Botswana as in the Philippines. The Philippine government by all indications has intended to be as positive toward cooperatives as Botswana, and both have been stable. Bolivia has experienced changes of government, and applied less direct government intervention or assistance.

The evaluator received some indications suggesting that a combination of institutional complexity, including bureaucratic rivalry, and misguided selection within government of some organizational goals for cooperatives may be credited with at least part of the Philippine record. He cannot claim conclusive insights on these complex matters. The hypothesis here, however, is that VDC projects have suffered in achieving positive results in this context.

The importance the evaluator attaches to the external factors described is strengthened by a further consideration. In the process of planning the field inquiries, Botswana and Lesotho were considered as alternate countries representing Africa. The evaluator had a preference for Botswana, largely because of an impression (perhaps fragmentary) of Lesotho cooperative development, gathered in an unrelated task in 1980. The impression was one of very frequent and somewhat drastic changes in government structures, policies, and staff affecting cooperatives, erratic and sometimes unfavorable pricing policies, etc. Without pressing the details, the impression is one of largely unfavorable external factors, equalling if not exceeding those in the Philippines. External conditions affecting the prospect of positive results of VDC projects deserve specific consideration in decisions on acceptance.

Respondents considered the volunteers they remembered highly qualified for the tasks assigned. Laudatory comments were made, suggesting that volunteers were recognized as authorities, and their findings thus readily gained acceptance. The one critical comment cited earlier indicates this one person felt the volunteer may have had a slightly aloof manner, which view others, especially more senior people, may not have shared. In any event, technical qualification is not involved. The DA survey of Missions in 1980 elicited highly favorable responses from all but one Mission. There even are grounds to discount this one unfavorable response.

The strength of favorable comments about qualifications of volunteers, and the few qualifying comments received (though invited) is striking. While possible bias may enter, the respondents are not perceived as too polite to express reservations. A few respondents explicitly or by implication indicated a distinct preference for VDC volunteers over (fully paid) consultants, due to

superior qualifications and performance. Regarding performance, some said that other consultants often confine themselves to a narrow scope of work with little flexibility, or exert themselves to develop further contracts. Volunteers were generally considered more flexible and distinctly willing to depart when the work is completed. (There is one moderate exception to the final point). The relevance of the comparison is not to attack paid consultants, but to further develop the point that VDC volunteers have been highly respected and frequently personally admired.

The VDC volunteers then, have achieved very nearly uniform and solid acceptance for their qualifications and skills. The evaluator reviewed the work experience of many of them, as recorded in VDC files. Certainly "on paper" they appear most impressive.

Indeed, it is vital to VDC policies regarding assignment of volunteers that they be very well chosen. VDC assigns and does not nominate or propose a volunteer. A few cases were noted in the files, in which a cooperative or agency questioned the qualifications of a volunteer. When such reservations have not been removed, VDC has withdrawn its acceptance. This policy will be discussed later.

The respondents were asked who benefitted from the project, and in what ways. A majority of the responses voluntarily made a distinction between benefits to the officials and staff of the cooperative or agency, and the cooperative members. This distinction speaks well for the perception by these persons about the process of making decisions and implementing them. In nearly all cases, officials must be affected first.

Comments on the nature of the benefits tended to be in the form of repeating changes that were made and recommendations implemented. No specific comment suggesting a measurable effect on prices, costs, and incomes was noted. While such impacts are generally hoped for, it is not surprising that respondents do not really and readily perceive the small VDC projects as so powerful and immediate in final impact as to measurably affect primary economic variables. The great majority of respondents do clearly perceive their parts of the cooperative systems as being economic and commercial, however, not primarily social or political instruments.

Finally, what socio-economic levels do project beneficiaries represent? While there were some variations in responses, the strong tendency was to say the cooperative participants and eventual beneficiaries strongly represent persons with about average incomes, for the area, with a moderate to substantial representation of persons with lower than average incomes. Several respondents suggested that cooperatives providing agricultural marketing or supply distribution services have little to offer the larger and wealthier farmers. Variations in responses are considered too narrow and overlaid with semantic complications to justify attempts to distinguish.8/

8/ Efforts to describe socio-economic groups encounter the tendency to include a large income span, and frequently many persons having much higher than average incomes, within a "middle class" concept. There is no assurance that the responses cited in this report are immune from this tendency.

A variety of forces may affect these responses. First, and hopefully primary is the respondent's knowledge. Second, his more subjective impressions. Third, his goals or preferences. It is perceived that nearly all respondents at least imagine themselves as wanting to provide service to poorer people. Fourth, their perception of what the evaluator hoped to hear. It may be noted that, as commercial operations in some form or other, or as government officials primarily serving such cooperatives, the respondents probably are deeply affected by the need of the cooperatives to engage in commerce, including economic services. A trading or service volume is essential. It is easy, in these circumstances, to somewhat overlook societal groups having no direct need for these services. Cooperatives are not appropriate instruments for direct welfare.

The few AID officials interviewed largely supported the outside respondents, or said it really is primarily a middle income group that is served. They readily recognize the possible bias in answers, and that there were no solid economic data in their countries on this point.

It should be observed that all three countries visited are poor. Both the Philippines and Bolivia had a per capita GNP of $510 and Botswana had $620 in 1978, according to the World Bank. Income distribution is relatively concentrated in the Philippines, with the highest 20 percent receiving 54 percent of the total.9/ No data are reported for Bolivia or Botswana. A similar or greater concentration presumably exists in Bolivia. Thus, any reasonable interpretation of these fragmentary data indicates that service to both the lower and the middle income group in these countries distinctly falls comfortably within the worldwide definition of the poor majority. Efforts to serve lower income groups should be supported, but success in such efforts is commonly hard to achieve. The viability of functioning cooperatives should not be destroyed in unrealistic efforts to serve the poorest people. Cooperatives are not the preferred instrument to provide assistance to everyone.

The VDC field representatives were asked questions paralleling some of the client interviews, but in relation to projects in their regions generally. They spoke very highly of the qualifications of volunteers in their area, of the solid satisfaction of clients with those qualifications and the actual work. Finally, they believe the majority of recommendations of most volunteers have been adopted.

When the representatives were asked for negative impressions, the only one forthcoming involved a first-time volunteer who perhaps experienced rather severe cultural shock in his working situation. This may have slowed his work and tended to confine it to less than the volunteer's full scope of ability. A careful briefing of new volunteers about their expected working and living environment may help to avoid "culture shock."

The responses of field representatives are so similar to those of persons representing clients as to suggest a remarkable agreement on both sides, or at the worst, a consistent lack of understanding.

9/ World Bank, World Development Report, 1980, p. 166.

Projects Not Implemented

The evaluation was proposed to include examination of projects proposed to VDC that were not implemented, and particularly:

A. Why were the projects not implemented?

B. Implications of non-selection for project development activity.

C. Implications of non-selection for recruitment of volunteers.

The projects proposed but not implemented must be divided into two categories. The more tangible group includes those for which a formal request was received, but the project not implemented. The other group is large, varied, and somewhat elusive: proposals discussed in the field or through correspondence, but not resulting in a formal request.

While 200 projects were implemented and completed from 1971 through March 31, 1981, a total of 315 requests had been numbered serially.10/ However, some of the remaining 115 still were "active" at least to the extent of further correspondence with the cooperative to clarify the nature of the assistance requested, or to recruit a suitable volunteer.

A separate examination of projects numbered serially 101-270 showed that 66 were not implemented by March 1981. Allowing for probable later implementation of at least several, it is realistic to say VDC has been implementing less than two-thirds of the requests received and numbered.11/

Files were reviewed on about 20 projects not implemented. Most of these files provide a definite reason for the tabling or rejection. Reasons for inaction or refusal can be divided between those involving the cooperative or local government decisions, and those passed over or rejected by VDC.

Local: Cooperative or Government

1. Cooperative declined to promise an interpreter.

2. Key personnel of cooperative lost in a plane crash.

3. Cooperative decided not to proceed with proposal involving need for volunteer.

10/ The 315 requests represent a modest understatement, since VDC reports it until recently had reassigned some numbers after requests were eliminated in some manner, or rejected. VDC now numbers all applications.

11/ Three of the 66 projects had been assigned, or there was active recruitment, by mid-June.

4. Requesting organization decided against employing a cooperative form of organization and operation.

5. Requesting organization insistence on specific commitment of volunteer for a longer time than VDC proposed. This conflicted with VDC policy that volunteer, in consultation with the chief executive of the requesting organization, decides when he has accomplished all he can at this time.

6. Government questioned qualifications of nominee, requested nomination of alternates for local selection. VDC withdrew, in line with policy against clearance of individuals.

7. Local government decision to decline external volunteer in favor of using in-country personnel.

8. Bureaucratic impasse or delay in government over approval procedures, or action under procedures.

9. Cancelled by government, no reason given.

10. Rejection of nominee; reasons evidently relating to person's previous work in country (outside VDC program).

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11. VDC unable to locate appropriate 2-person team of specialists on a timely basis, to implement project.

12. VDC decision that its assistance would not make a significant contribution.

13. Long delay, later reactivation including new request and project number.

Several of these reasons cover more than one project that was reviewed. Also, the "sample" and review process were less than scientific in additional ways.

The project proposals discussed, but not reaching the form of a formal request, also may be explored before conclusions are advanced. The varied notes and correspondence in VDC files include additional instances similar to those enumerated, but appear to place greater emphasis on decisions within the cooperatives, and those of VDC, vs. governmental and procedural.

14. Definition of tangible problem situations, policy issues, etc. capable of work by a short-term specialist.

15. Clarification by VDC of limits of its authority and its policies.

16. Determination by VDC of the extent of genuine desire and commitment of the cooperatives, (VDC policy requiring $500 contribution by clients--with exceptions--is one measure.)

Discussion

The review of VDC files as they relate to projects not implemented proved illuminating from the standpoint of many decisions that must be made and issues confronted in conducting a volunteer program.

The evaluator considers VDC responsive to both formal requests and inquiries. VDC appears vigorous in the form of extensive correspondence with cooperatives and government officials, consultation by the field representatives, and recruitment by the Washington office. No notes or correspondence were observed, charging laxity or indifference.12

The field representatives insist that clients have found VDC faster to respond than other channels of request. This is said to be a significant source of the general satisfaction with and indeed popularity of VDC. VDC analysis shows an average of 53 days from the date of acceptance until the volunteer leaves the U.S.

There was observed no indication of subject matter selectivity by VDC, among categories of cooperative action. One source of the diversity, in recent years, may be the backgrounds of the three field representatives. There is no indication they have particularly strong ties to any specific group of U.S. cooperatives. Their field contacts are likely to be amply balanced.

Most of the reasons for non-implementation relating to cooperatives and government suggest no issues. Certainly cooperatives and others may make decisions on their own before an expatriate specialist arrives (#3, #4). Along the same line, if local government project clearance is involved, the government may decide against inviting an expatriate for the task, however nominal the internal cost (#7). Needed resources may not exist, such as for an interpreter (#1), or this may be a measure of the extent of commitment.

VDC and similar organizations are more than justified in weighing what they can do effectively, insisting on tangible identification of problem issues, and in weighing the commitment of requesting organizations (#12, #14, #16). This is a vital part of good management of all technical assistance, and doubly important where volunteer and other low-cost services are provided.

The process of project definition deserves further treatment, including its role in projects that are accepted. The representatives play the leading role for VDC in project definition. This is essential first in identifying a workable and constructive role for VDC, or that there is none. Second, a good definition is needed in recruitment. Third, the definition provides the volunteer his primary official entree and assistance in getting underway. The evaluator considers project definition and not stimulation of projects the key role of field representatives, within the current broad policies of VDC.

12/ It would be surprising if a view of at least slowness were not sometimes held by a requesting organization, of course. This may be assumed, whether or not noted.

The VDC policy against external clearance of individual volunteers clearly has aroused some objections. Those who have raised questions, ranging from cooperatives themselves to government officials to AID staff, all no doubt consider their reasons adequate. Most or all reasons probably can be divided between those relating to technical qualifications and those involving the prerogative and process of clearance.

The evaluator considers VDC far better equipped than any others to appraise qualifications. The knowledge among officials of cooperatives and governments of the breadth and dimensions of experience even within professional categories in the U.S. is likely to be faulty and dated. AID staff may be little if any better equipped. There is the additional quality relating to the VDC program that most volunteers have had long and perhaps varied careers. The qualities and skills of these persons is quite a different thing from that of recent professional graduates. VDC applies a rather intensive process of field discussion of the requests, through the regional representatives, supplemented by correspondence as needed, to further guide the selection of volunteers. For these and other reasons, VDC has assumed responsibility for selection of volunteers, and refuses to accept a process of clearance of individuals. It is a serious responsibility, but must be weighed in relation to all considerations.

The validity of the VDC recruitment process has so much at stake in relation to volunteers as to make the issue basic. A person with many years of successful professional or managerial experience, and who has volunteered to work without salary in a remote location is most unlikely to understand rejection by officials of a cooperative, a government bureau, or an AID Mission, none of whom know his record in detail. Even if VDC were to accept individual clearance for a time, and a few rejections ensued, word of this would likely spread among significant U.S. cooperative systems, and rather quickly jeopardize the recruitment process. This evaluator has worked sufficiently in the process of recruiting salaried technical specialists to be sensitive to their strong adverse reactions to the clearance process. He considers such a process entirely unacceptable for a volunteer program. AID must continue to grant VDC the authority, and VDC must accept the responsibility to assign volunteers without individual clearance.

The process of defining projects may often result in their withdrawal, or non-acceptance by VDC. The discussions and communications between cooperatives and VDC (field representatives and the president) in defining problem situations represent a significant (sometimes major) element in solving the problems without needing a volunteer. Cooperative management may readily solve a problem themselves, if they have some help in defining it specifically. The evaluator considers this a substantial element in management consulting. Therefore VDC proposes soundly, that work of the field representatives themselves, and communications between VDC and cooperatives, contains some program output. This applies both to some potential or formal requests never implemented, and to some of those that are.

The projects not selected should be reviewed periodically by VDC staff as guidance for project development activity. The newly assigned project director might make this one of his tasks. Both the president and director would logically then advise the regional representatives separately, or at annual staff meetings, about program priorities and recruitment potentials and bottlenecks. This should help to avoid some applications that would not be implemented.

Cost Effectiveness of VDC Approach

Efforts to provide data on VDC costs relative to other project approaches proved rather fruitless. The offices contacted either stated they had not prepared such analyses, or presented reasons the fragmentary available data are not comparable. Comparability is difficult indeed to achieve, requiring a series of assumptions about office support, personal support, fringe benefits, administrative overhead of AID Missions, and administrative overhead of contractors. AID apparently had given low priority to deriving data on cost per year or month of project professional input.

The data on VDC costs are relatively simple, but even here, alternative assumptions yield differing data. Progressive steps of estimation are presented as follows.13/ Total cash costs of VDC were $557,504 in 1979, and $558,536 in 1980. There were 2621 days of volunteer time in 1979 and 1759 in 1980, assuming a continuous 7-day week.

It is necessary to recognize, however, that productive work of volunteers only occurs in the field. Briefing time, travel, and debriefing must be excluded. This is estimated to average 10 days per project, for 38 volunteers in 1979 and 33 in 1980. This reduces the gross field days to 2241 in 1979 and 1429 in 1980. The daily cost thus becomes:

	Cost Assuming 7-day Week	
	1979	1980
Per total gross day	$212.71	$317.53
Per gross field day	248.77	390.86

If one assumes, however, a more realistic 6-day week, the unit cost is higher:

	Cost Assuming 6-day Week	
	1979	1980
Per total net day	$248.22	$370.38
Per net field day	298.77	474.14

13/ This series of estimates assumes there is no program output except by the volunteers. In fact, it is argued at several places in this evaluation that there is some program output by the field representatives. This is difficult to measure, other than entirely arbitrarily.

These data include all VDC cash costs, for administration, project development, and direct project operations. These costs are higher than one initially would assume for a volunteer program. It should be noted that there is a substantial and highly rewarding program development activity. This is considered to make a major contribution to program effectiveness. Costs have escalated, of course, as a result of increased transportation, hotel and restaurant meal costs, and as applied to VDC the effect reflects the policy of the spouses accompanying the volunteer. None of this suggests criticism, merely explanation.

The daily cost of maintaining a short-term consultant through one of the Indefinite Quantity Contracts of AID clearly is substantially greater. One set of computations was made suggesting a daily cost of $650, for time in the field of senior-level consultants, again using a 6-day week.

Again, there seems to be no easy way to provide comparison with a resident advisor posted by a contractor.

There is a sharp difference between the extent of AID administrative time devoted to a VDC volunteer and ordinary consultants or resident contractual staff. VDC does maintain contact with AID Missions, and this review considers such liaison valuable on both sides, but such liaison requires relatively little time. Designated VDC contacts in AID Missions made the point that the relative independence of VDC from Mission support and administrative procedures is considered a significant advantage.

While the preceding discussion has excluded the value of volunteers' time, this is a major feature; they are ultimately the primary vehicle for the work. VDC valued their time at $351,575 for 1980, or an average of $200 per day with a 6-day week. Most undoubtedly have commanded salaries that high or higher. A second and preferred option, however, is to use the current maximum rate normally allowable for short-term consultants in AID programs, $192 daily, and a 6-day week. This gives a total of $274,368 for the 1429 days (6-day week) in 1980.

While it is not presumed that a benefit/cost calculation can be made, the findings of the field review of projects should be recalled. Results of the VDC projects were considered very important in nearly all cases, and the skills and performance of the volunteer rated very high. The responses can only be said to indicate very high effectiveness of the VDC program. Experience of the evaluator in various AID programs suggests that relatively few of them could match such a favorable review.

The VDC program does involve significant dollar cost, especially when reduced to the basis of effective volunteer days in the field. Virtually all alternative forms of technical assistance would be shown to involve higher cash costs, however, if an analysis were available or undertaken on a similarly solid basis including all costs. The total cost would be roughly comparable, if a realistic imputed value of volunteer time were added to VDC cash costs. The consistently high standards maintained by VDC in its volunteers, and the field responses concerning their performance and results is of course the other major side of the equation.

Cost of Developing Projects

Most of the work of the regional field representatives is considered devoted to program development. A smaller part is devoted to project evaluation. VDC has developed a series of factors it applies to salaries and costs of each employee, and to administrative costs, in segregating program development costs, and other cost categories. These factors were reviewed and are considered realistic in relation to conduct of the total program as determined from discussions, materials in the files, and observations of office operations.

Thus, VDC's own estimates of program development costs are used:

1979 cost	$141,898	(35 projects)
1980 cost	158,171	(31 projects)

These totals again can be applied to the number of projects completed, to effective volunteer days, or calculated on other bases. The simplest and perhaps most useful basis is the number of projects completed. On this basis:

1979 development cost per project	$4054
1980 development cost per project	$5102

One reason to avoid translating these figures to a cost per effective volunteer day, is that truly effective project development may have the opposite effect. Good project definition should help to identify a qualified volunteer, and later assist him in starting the assignment quickly and productively.14/

Finally, it has been suggested that the field representatives contribute to problem solutions, that they too have a program output. To that extent, the program development cost is overstated, and project completions somewhat understate output.

Program development does involve a substantial cost, as has been seen. The evaluator gained a substantial respect for this activity, however, during his analysis. All field representatives were interviewed. Much material was found in project and country files reflecting their work. Finally, there was an incidental opportunity to observe one in the field for a few days. They are considered to contribute materially to the quality of projects VDC undertakes; their knowledge of local situations to the preparation of the volunteer; and their association with many cooperative officials, to the acceptance of volunteers when they arrive.

This evaluation will outline later a proposal for somewhat systematic analysis of project settings, toward a goal of selecting projects with the best chances of positive results. The field representatives would need to play a major role in this. It would involve raising a portion of their work to a higher level of professionalism.

14/ A similar viewpoint may be suggested for total program costs. Is the cost per day or cost per project more relevant?

Role of Short-Term Technical Assistance

What issues and situations call for short-term technical assistance? The views of the evaluator will be presented, supplemented by some comments and interpretations by field respondents.

A short-term consultant is most relevant to relatively defined topics. These may include policies, managerial matters, operating matters, narrowly defined staff training, or analyses of feasibility of proposed operations, to name major categories. The scope of work must be confined to one or at most two of the preceding or comparable categories, for effective results. One person rarely has broader expertise in any genuine sense, even if time permitted adequate consideration.

A broad process of institution building, broad education and personnel development programs demand long-term assistance. Short-term consultants, and instructors may also provide a vital supplementary role in the long-term assistance, providing specific ingredients and spot support for broader long-term advisors.

Some respondents in Botswana and Bolivia provided very similar statements. Officials of the apparently better managed cooperatives especially stressed the need to have a well defined task.

A few respondents expressed a rather comprehensive preference for short-term vs. long-term advisors. These comments may reflect a combination of the level of specialization attainable, the extent of needed support, and the difficulty of maintaining a consistently productive relationship between a long-term advisor and the organization he supports. One respondent said you sometimes forget why a resident consultant is there. Of course, some of these conditions change if a long-term expatriate actually occupies an operating rather than advisory role. A short-term person cannot effectively do that.

Short-term technical assistance usually is not considered more than incidentally relevant to institution building. Certainly one would not plan to respond to any situation requiring a broad program of institution building by short-term assistance alone. Almost surprisingly, however, contemplation of VDC actions in certain settings suggests a significant institution-building result. This idea is simply introduced here, and will not be examined in detail.

The strongest illustration relates to Botswana Cooperative Union, the Botswana apex cooperative organization. A case can be made that the several (intermittent) VDC volunteers, serving on strategic points and times, have contributed materially to the emergence of a vigorous cooperative system in this small country. Somewhat the same point could be made for cooperatives in central and eastern Bolivia. VDC has completed seven projects with three major cooperatives there, with excellent overall results. These cooperatives appear to be the heart of a vigorous system of cooperatives.

VDC Sponsorship and Coordination

VDC is unique among the six cooperative organizations in several ways, including that each project implemented falls within the subject matter area of one or more of the other five. Only VDC receives a grant specifically to provide short-term technical assistance through volunteers, and VDC has no funds for paid technical consultants.

The topics of VDC sponsorship and VDC coordination are interrelated. After a few comments, an outline of some optional relationships may help to organize the discussion. VDC currently has four US sponsoring organizations, ACDI, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and the cooperative educational organization, American Institute of Cooperation (AIC).

A "plan" for cooperative sponsorship and support was prepared, presented, and adopted at the VDC annual meeting April 8, 1981. This plan actually is a restatement and documentation of standing policies: "VDC's directors will invite the chief executive officer or the chairman of the board of directors of the following organizations to join as directors of VDC . . .VDC directors' responsibilities are to participate in directing VDC's affairs and to support it, financially and otherwise. By providing such support, each director brings his organization into sponsorship of VDC.

"Where appropriate, VDC consults its sponsor organization on acceptance of each application for assistance it receives and on the choice of volunteer. VDC urges its sponsor organization, where appropriate, to participate in orienting its volunteer, and each VDC volunteer reports to appropriate sponsoring organizations on his return to Washington." Sponsors are thus seen to join in financial support, (now $6500 a year), in policy making through the board of directors, and in specific operational steps.

VDC clearly also communicates frequently with non-sponsors in the conduct of some projects and others have even occasionally provided a volunteer from their staff. There is no routine policy of consultation.

This long-standing and recently reaffirmed VDC policy implements, to the extent of sponsor organizations, the DA recommendation that a process for recruiting volunteers from cooperative organizations be formalized. The VDC policy takes the form of soliciting recommendations, and including volunteers not necessarily <u>from</u> the organizations.

Alternative policies for AID consideration may be outlined as follows:

A. Support a volunteer program in VDC only

   1. Encourage cooperative sponsorship, or
   2. Require cooperative sponsorship

Comment: Such a requirement would intrude seriously on the private and voluntary feature of the organizations, an important matter among most U.S. cooperatives. It also would require money. Allowing the privileges of sponsorship without assurance of shared responsibility seems rather empty and illogical.

B. Support a volunteer program in VDC and other cooperative organizations.

1. Overlapping authority

Comment: While this initially appears to have some appeal, overlapping authority presents problems of potential significant conflict. Indeed, an organization--presumably not VDC--with authority and funding both for volunteer actions and for compensated consultant actions would face the need to explain to some potential volunteers why others were paid.

2. With curtailed VDC authority

Comment: Aid grants could specify that VDC is excluded from certain project subjects. Would parallel project development programs then be required? At what cost? What would be the extent of crippling to VDC program development? To what extent would confusion result among cooperative organizations in developing countries?

C. Program Consultation

1. Systematically with VDC sponsors and ad hoc with others.

Comment: This is the current VDC policy. The situation appears less ideal for VDC or AID than full representation of cooperative systems as sponsors, and some instances of friction have occurred. No major impasse has been reported.

2. Required of VDC with all

Comment: This would destroy motivation for financial contributions and appear to provide participation with little assurance of shared responsibility. The integrity of VDC as a voluntary organization would be damaged seriously.

The DA report in 1980 recommended more definitive action by AID than this evaluator can support. DA noted that other cooperative organizations were trying to develop short-term activities that VDC could do. They then proposed AID action through the Advisory Council on Overseas Cooperative Development to seek consensus. If a consensus did not emerge, AID should meet with VDC and others to refine goal statements and to examine organizational relationships.

The evaluator believes that provision for both volunteer and compensated short-term assistance is essential. There is certainly no assurance that a qualified volunteer can be secured in all cases. It is the experience and viewpoint of the evaluator that AID frequently assigns persons to cooperative tasks through non-specialized consulting firms, who are less qualified than the cooperative organizations could provide. Arrangements to exploit the full capability and resources of cooperative organizations should be simplified and expanded, not restricted. Occasional untidiness may occur but seems inevitable in bureaucratic operations.

AID initiatives to raise the topic of goals statements and mutual exploration of organizational relationships are excellent. Any vigorous attempt, however, to direct the goals and organizational relationships would conflict quickly with the private and voluntary nature of the several organizations. These characteristics are so central to the essence of cooperation that the Congress and AID presumably have desired to disseminate, that AID should be cautious in its efforts to achieve organizational neatness. Central qualities should not be damaged. (See A2, above).

In conclusion, the present situation is somewhat less than ideal, but has proven generally workable. Fuller U.S. cooperative sponsorship of VDC would be beneficial and potentially smoother, but partial sponsorship has not proven seriously crippling to achievement of VDC goals. Problems identified to the evaluator do not appear to require drastic and potentially damaging action.

From the standpoint of program cost to AID, significant policy changes would appear to incur increased total cost or reduced efficiency. Efforts to build mutual confidence and eventual shared responsibility are appropriate.

AID Briefings

The evaluator gained only a limited perception directly of the substance and value of AID briefings to volunteers. Based on conversations with VDC staff, and prior experience of the evaluator directly in AID, he believes and would expect the AID briefings to vary widely in content and depth. The many and varied duties of AID staff probably has equal or greater effect on "depth" and detail, as the interests of the individual.

VDC makes primary arrangements with desk officers for briefings, and encourages that officer to invite appropriate technical people. VDC advises the desk officer that it will invite the regional officer for Private and Voluntary Organizations (PVO), and the central FPVA/PVC monitor. These participate only occasionally, and the desk officer frequently represents AID alone.15/ There are occasional separate technical briefings.

15/ The average length is reported to be less than 30 minutes, not suggesting great depth or scope.

Primary contact with desk officers has advantages and disadvantages. In the direction of briefing the volunteer, they generally are in the best position to provide briefing on the country setting and any specifically relevant social and political information. They may be well qualified to discuss the economic setting and general institutional relationships in the economy. They should have a solid knowledge of AID programs and other major assistance programs in the country. In the other direction, keeping AID informed of VDC activities before and following projects, the desk officer certainly is the best single link.

In principle, AID would be able to provide specialized briefing in such areas as economics, agriculture, sociological aspects of rural development, etc. However, it would require considerable pre-planning and involve additional briefing time, to develop and exploit the resources. Most regional bureaus of AID do not treat cooperatives sytematically as a separate and substantial topic.

Briefings with AID Missions are perhaps more important. A somewhat lengthy argument could be developed on various aspects of such briefings, involving time of AID staff and volunteers, maintenance of the co-op to co-op independence of the VDC program, the probable substantive benefits, etc. Omitting all this, the evaluator believes briefings at AID Missions are likely to be valuable to the volunteer, as well as providing a needed liaison with the in-country AID program. They should be missed for only compelling reasons. This is covered by written instructions to volunteers. Additional consultations between the volunteer and AID staff during the project depend on the nature of the project and interests of Mission staff and the volunteer.

It may be noted that VDC volunteers are advised to contact a person in the AID Mission the field representative or desk officer believes is most directly interested in the specific project, and that this person is not necessarily recognized in the Mission for continuing liaison with VDC. Hence, successive volunteers may meet with a series of staff persons, even if the Mission staff were constant, which it is not. The intention is not to criticize these practices, but to clarify that there is no assurance each Mission will have an "institutional memory" of VDC activities. Also, Congress evidently intended this situation, in mandating direct cooperative-to-cooperative activities. These conditions, however, severely reduce the value of general inquiries addressed to AID Missions about VDC activities, such as in the DA evaluation of 1980. There can be no assurance the responses reflect general knowledge.

VDC has a substantial interest in building AID knowledge of and interest in its program and cooperative development generally. At least four parts of AID in Washington may be relevant to building this interest, the desks, the technical staff, Regional PVO Liaison officer, the Congressional Liaison staff, and the VDC project monitor in FPVA/PVC. The latter has, of course, the primary responsibility and initiative concerning AID support of VDC.

Contacts and good will with desks and the Regional PVO Liaison officers also are relevant to maintaining AID support, since the regional bureaus are called upon periodically for views and for clearance of financial obligations to support VDC. Systematic and meaningful contacts with technical staff specifically interested in cooperatives would be valuable in principle, but probably not feasible to achieve. Such interests are too diffused, and the VDC staff too limited.

These comments are largely in support of VDC policies concerning AID briefings, as those policies are understood. The recently appointed project director presides over Washington technical and desk briefings and coordination, involving field representatives, if they're in town. Volunteers themselves must take the initiative for Mission briefings, under the guidance of VDC policies and conditioned by the interest and response of individual AID Missions.

Congressional Briefings

VDC files include detailed notes on many individual Congressional briefings. It is VDC policy for each volunteer on his return, to report to his Representative and two Senators. The actual interview is more often than not with a staff person.

The VDC viewpoint is that these reports are primarily to inform lawmakers how this small share of AID funds was spent. VDC provides in advance basic biographic information, and a description of the project, and escorts the volunteer.

The actual effect of these briefings on volunteer satisfaction has not been appraised. This presumably would vary widely among volunteers, and depending on the reception at the individual Congressional offices. Numerous factors may determine that reception, and the interaction with a specific volunteer. These probably are too complex to predict the outcome in any operational way that could be applied in guiding the briefing process. The only current exception is that volunteers, and particularly "repeat" ones, are provided some voice concerning the omission of individual meetings. This practice seems appropriate.

The Congressional briefings probably have a modest positive effect on Congressional support for cooperative programs in nearly all individual cases. The VDC program is considered to be favorably linked with one or more positive interests of nearly all Representatives and Senators:

1. Technical assistance to developing countries

2. Private and voluntary development action (generally, and cooperatives specifically)

a. Involving U.S. private and voluntary actions and/or

b. Involving and seeking to stimulate foreign private and voluntary actions

3. Utilization/involvement of individual volunteers in technical assistance

4. Continued use of expertise of retirees

5. Self-help and participatory development actions

The evaluator proposes consideration of two viewpoints and modest revisions in the policy on Congressional briefings. These suggestions are intended initially for VDC internal discussion, and then discussion with AID, since they have far more direct and extensive knowledge of the process. First, and primarily, the Congressional briefings may and probably should be exploited through specific efforts to solicit Congressional support for cooperative actions including VDC specifically. There should be a sufficient fund of experience to select appropriate cases, and to guide the process. Such emphasis appears almost required, to justify continued application of substantial staff time to the briefings. There are legal and ethical constraints on activities involving representations to Congress, it is recognized. VDC may consult the FPVA/PVC monitor, or its own attorney on this matter. VDC appears, however, to have been more cautious or non-aggressive than required and perhaps justified in its relations with Congress.

Second, individual Congressional briefings already are, and should selectively be sacrificed in order to save time and possibly avoid annoyance in a few cases. A few guidelines have been suggested by the discussion: the Congressman's interests, individual desire of the volunteer, repetition, etc. A rather informal process of selection is proposed at most, particularly since a more rigorous procedure would likely defeat any effort to reduce staff time.

Issues From Previous Evaluations

Some issues raised in the Hubbell evaulation of VDC in 1974, and the DA evaluation of cooperative programs in 1980 have been mentioned earlier in this report. Several other points will be addressed here.

Hubbell was concerned about securing a larger number of requests. This was early in the VDC program. By now, both further experience and the assignment of field representatives has amply satisfied this need. He suggested prompt acknowledgement of applications. There appears still to be somewhat of a delay in acknowledging some applications, providing time for internal discussion and some exploration to provide a substantive reply. A policy of prompt simple acknowledgement is recommended, making clear that the acknowledgement does not indicate final VDC acceptance of the feasibility of implementing the project. At the minimum, such a letter would resolve any uncertainty about whether a request had arrived, and when.

Hubbell considered VDC linkage with AID Missions, concluding the lack of close ties was largely an achievement. Congressional and AID policy intends private rather than government to government action in some cases. Also, this reduces the burden on short-staffed Missions. He found that in some cases AID Missions denied knowledge of volunteers, though the volunteers had contacted them. The present evaluator found that the field representatives are able to cite cases of failure of internal Mission communication concerning their visits. The view and recommendation of the evaluator is that the private and cooperative to cooperative character of VDC action should be paramount. However, the minimum contacts, included in current VDC policies, are that the field representative should contact the AID Mission during each visit, and each volunteer should solicit a briefing and a debriefing session at the Mission. A written communication may be used to substitute in occasional instances where a personal contact is not feasible.

DA suggested that VDC could serve as a clearinghouse on cooperative information. Staff might record more information for the files and circulate informational notes to other organizations, particularly providing a list of names and addresses of cooperatives contacted. This evaluator shares the DA desire to capitalize on available information, but hesitates to recommend a formalized process. A regular, written process would add substantially to the work of field representatives plus adding clerical work. The depth and nature of individual contacts is extremely varied and many very likely do not yield information worth sharing. Other organizations also make field contacts; any policy should be applied uniformly. Finally, any positive policy would be complicated by issues of relationships among the organizations, which were discussed earlier. There is no simple way to place that on a thoroughly collaborative basis, and therefore the exchange of data probably must remain less than complete.

VDC does share information extensively with its sponsor organizations, and frequently with others where program interests are mutual, or to avoid conflict.

Both Hubbell and DA proposed strengthening the VDC evaluation process. A later section will develop the present evaluator's proposals and cite certain earlier proposals. The VDC evaluations were observed correctly to lack employment of baseline data. The action that this evaluator supports is an effort by field representatives to identify and appraise major conditions relating to the proposed project in advance, and a more specific effort to appraise those conditions in the evaluation process. At most, this would be an ad hoc application of the baseline concept.

Basic VDC Program Elements

As indicated in discussing the emphasis and structure of the report, the preceding material now will be consolidated in considering the VDC program as a system. A moderate amount of new discussion will be introduced.

It should again be emphasized that the VDC program is basically sound. The major and minor recommendations introduced are for further strengthening. The major recommendations actually focus on one theme. This is that an intensified process of project and program evaluation focussed on individual countries and cooperative segments can yield guidance for more selective program development and final selection of projects most likely to yield significant positive results. A willingness to accept or reject project requests on the basis implied is required, plus the human relations skill to present and explain the resulting decisions to the officials involved, without offending them.

It is a further intention that these recommendations should not be regarded critical of past VDC programs. VDC only now, after completing 200 projects, and including at least six projects each in 14 countries, is considered to have accumulated sufficient experience to implement the proposed adjustments in a significant way.16/ The proposals are seen as applicable primarily in those countries where such a number of projects has been completed.

Evaluation

While evaluation is the last step in the project cycle, it is the entry point for proposed strengthening. VDC has a current system of evaluation which provides a reliable, simple record of the performance of volunteers and general results of the project. The present evaluator found the VDC evaluation reports entirely objective for projects reviewed in the field. Indeed, comments recorded by the reviewing field representative were on the whole more critical both of the operational situation and of the execution of the project, than the present evaluator was able to secure. The field representatives clearly apply their full knowledge of the cooperative or agency, and not the responses secured in an individual interview alone, in completing the evaluation report. The ability to record such information reflects favorably on the process of periodic contacts with significant organizations, yielding both knowledge and rapport. The will to record adverse information reflects favorably on the integrity of VDC staff.

On several projects reviewed in the field, evaluation reports were not located in VDC files. While a systematic analysis of the rate of evaluation was not completed, it appears as many as ten to twenty percent of projects have not been evaluated. The policy is to do the evaluation from about eight to fifteen months following project completion. This timing appears correct, in terms of the time required to reach decisions and at least begin implementing changes, and also the memory span of people involved (not to mention the tendency to shift key staff frequently).

The current or revised evaluation process should be monitored more closely to insure that evaluations are completed in a reasonable time. A standard is proposed, that the project director and field representative

16/ The total projects completed in the 14 countries is 124, or 62 percent of the 200 grand total.

should provide the president a written justification for delay or omission before 18 months have passed, if an evaluation is not completed. Occasional delays are expected, especially in countries with little activity. Omissions may be justifiable. For example, one project in the Philippines involved sending a specialist as instructor to a training course conducted at a relatively distant location. Who really could provide a tangible evaluation of this volunteer's work, except individual course participants, immediately widely scattered? The probable result of a reasonable evaluation effort hardly justifies the time and cost in such a case. Whatever may be implied, this evaluator does not recommend attempting evaluations at this time on projects completed more than three years ago. Lapses simply occurred in the evaluation process.

The current evaluation format appears generally sufficient in describing the nature of the request, outlining briefly the volunteer's work, and summarizing recommendations implemented and not implemented. The proposed refinements would add or elaborate some sections.

An "External Considerations" paragraph would comment on favorable and unfavorable conditions affecting probable results. This might include need for the cooperative services, extent and effectiveness of government support, favorable/unfavorable pricing policies, etc. This paragraph should be monitored closely by reviewers, to insure that the conditions cited are solid, and had specific effects on the project outcome. It could otherwise be used as a "cop-out," excusing weak project execution.

The paragraph, "VDC's purpose in accepting the application" should omit material describing the cooperative, assuming adoption of the later proposed "Project Potential Appraisal," and description there. It should (continue to) recapitulate the problem situation, and should describe how VDC believed its volunteer could contribute to resolving the problems or issues involved. The latter must be linked to the pre-project "Appraisal."

The "Evaluation" paragraph should be divided. A first paragraph or section should consider recommendations implemented and refused, plus client organization's comments on performance of the volunteer, and on the overall project process. A second paragraph or section should appraise what actually was contributed to resolving problems or issues. The potential effects of the project as executed and received, on the final cooperative participants, should be addressed. Are there any institution-building effects, including those for specialized and technical tasks?

To recapitulate, the proposed revised evaluation outline would be somewhat as follows:

Date

Name of Evaluator

Project number and condensed title

1. Requesting organization
2. Volunteer
3. Dates of assignment
4. Assistance requested (application)
5. External considerations
6. VDC's purpose in accepting the application
7. Volunteer's work
8. Recommendations implemented/not implemented
9. Actual and expected impact on problems
10. Expected impact on final users
11. Persons interviewed

These refinements in the evaulations would require little additional time, perhaps an hour or two in the field. They would add perhaps a page to the evaluation report, and involve an hour or two of extra time in drafting and reviewing the evaluation report in the office. These changes are believed consistent with most of those made by Hubbell and by DA, except that the format of baseline data is omitted.

The most substantive parts of the current VDC evaluation process should be continued. The addition of paragraphs on external considerations, separate discussion of recommendations implemented, explicit discussion of impact on problems, and explicit comment on expected impact on final users, all would provide a more analytical report. Deliberate comparison of project outcome with pre-project expectations, through the soon to be proposed Project Potential Appraisal, should help gradually to further strengthen administration of the VDC program, affecting project development, selection, and implementation.

Project Development

The heart of VDC project development is the work of three regional representatives, for Africa-Near East, Asia-Pacific, and Caribbean-Latin America. Their primary role is to consult periodically with significant cooperative organizations and with government agencies serving cooperatives, in their assigned countries. They explore needs and especially work to define them, and follow up on correspondence including written requests for assistance of volunteers.

The position of project director has been added recently, and staffed by assigning Charles Cox, previously working as field representative in Africa. Cox will continue for the present to be field representative in Brazil, using his Portuguese competency. He had not become operational in the director role through July 15, largely because he was introducing a new Africa representative in the field. Many of the recommendations in this report are viewed as falling in his area of direct responsibility, or under his supervision.

While the regional representatives were introduced primarily to develop projects by promoting the VDC potential, this seems less needed today. The greater and in a sense more substantive role is to clarify needs, issues, and participate in briefing the volunteer either personally or through notes left at headquarters for the volunteer.

The representatives have performed very adequately in terms of securing requests ample to use the staff and financial resources of VDC. Files indicated on June 22 some 13 projects undergoing specific volunteer recruitment, and 28 awaiting action (decision to proceed, further clarification, rejection, etc.). This reserve, not necessarily backlog, appears from scattered records observed, to be slightly higher than usual. Nevertheless, there is no urgent need for more requests.

Project files and the days spent in association with one representative, in Bolivia, were found to indicate substantial clarification of projects by them. Sometimes the refinement was in direct field consultation, which entered into the drafting or revision of requests. It also takes the form of correspondence returned to headquarters, and notes prepared while personally there. Much of the work both in the field and at headquarters no doubt goes unrecorded.

Files for projects not implemented, and other country files, as well as discussions with VDC staff, indicated a substantial application of the knowledge of local situations, through the representatives, in selecting project requests for implementation.

Work of the representatives in terms of generating requests and guiding the program within the VDC mandate, is considered more than satisfactory. The evaluator considers these roles vital to the extremely decentralized program of intermittent advisory assistance, involving specialists frequently not experienced in developing countries, working across large cultural and institutional differences, and involving minimum support by AID Missions. The comparable needs and issues are complex enough in providing advisory assistance to U.S. cooperatives; the foreign (worldwide) program of VDC greatly magnifies the need.

VDC staff assert, and the files provide evidence, of an additional, more programmatic role of the representatives. Discussion of problem situations with potential clients may guide the cooperative, or agency, to develop its own solution. A problem that is clarified and well understood,

frequently can best be solved internally.17/ Very likely the skills of representatives in guiding group processes are as vital as their specialized knowledge of cooperatives, in approaching this function. The Peace Corps experience of all current representatives and the project director probably sharpened these skills. VDC should encourage its representatives to guide cooperatives gently toward self-solution of issues. Caution and judgement are needed, of course. The representatives should not overstep the margins of their expertise.

It now is recommended to raise program development to a higher level of selectivity in terms of expected impact. Much of this has been at least implied in earlier sections. The evaluation of previous projects, just discussed, provides a major input. The application in program development should include regulating the frequency of calls on one kind of institution, and specific ones, versus others, and indeed the frequency of stops of the representatives in a country. This already is done to some extent. The representatives presumably must be authorized and urged to outline tactfully, the criteria and appraisals based on them, as such unfold.

The field representative should prepare for each project request, a summary report on the cooperative, its situation, and expected results of the project. Much of this largely formalizes and gives more rigorous application to at least mental processes that appear already in operation to some extent. The summary can best be drafted in the field, when a representative is aware of a request in process, or may be completed in Washington. This "Project Potential Appraisal" should provide space for endorsement of the project director, and should be kept attached to the project request in the file.18/ The following topics are proposed:

1. Requesting organization: Name, address, description
2. Clarification of project request including restatement of project situation
3. Urgency (critical issues, seasonal imperatives, etc.)
4. Role, significance of cooperative or agency, economic setting.
5. Description of cooperative users (members)
6. Capability to implement expected recommendations (leadership capacity, administrative and technical competence, financial capacity, board-staff harmony)

17/ A philosophy and approach of self-management is of course central to cooperation. A major and most constructive role of external agencies and advisors is to strengthen the ability and willingness of cooperative officials and members to make their own decisions, and soundly.

18/ This "Appraisal" may appropriately be consolidated with the "Project Status Summary" previously employed by Cox in Africa, and now proposed by him worldwide.

7. Expected effects (as related to problems) of anticipated findings: Probability of adoption, results if adopted.

8. Housing, logistic support availability

9. Recommendation

Further, the representatives should prepare themselves to participate at headquarters in discussions of the overall progress of cooperative development in a country, as this reflects on past and probable impact of VDC projects.

These proposals add to the professional difficulty of the field representative work, and may require some time. It is considered better to spend time appraising the overall cooperative situation and judging the meaningful impact of past projects, than to generate further requests for probable no-win projects. This presumes that such can be identified.

As previously observed, there probably has been little opportunity for these steps until now. A range of experience seems required, and a few years of field representative work. Over 200 projects completed, and 14 countries with 6 to 14 projects each, seems a good starting point. The proposed process should focus initially on these 14 countries: Brazil, Jamaica, Thailand, Honduras, Bolivia, Indonesia, Philippines, Turkey, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Lesotho, Malaysia, and Paraguay (by frequency, and alphabetically). A further priority is appropriate for Brazil, Bolivia, the Philippines and Costa Rica, where several projects each are in process or awaiting action. A rate of 3 - 5 country appraisals per year would be a good start, without impinging seriously on staff time for other duties.

Brazil may warrant the application of a somewhat rigorous criterion, especially for project requests originating in the more prosperous parts of the country. The evaluator certainly believes the VDC program is justified in the North, Northeast, and West of Brazil.

Project Approval

Project approval is the time of decision, based on feasibility of the project request, appraisal of past experience, and interpretation of the project situation. VDC practice has emphasized project feasibility and the prospect of locating a qualified volunteer. Attention also has been given to the significance of the cooperative. Suitable housing and logistic support are essential.

The recommended changes will bring to bear a more explicit consideration of past experience in nearby or similar situations, and interpretation of the project situation in terms of probable results. As earlier discussion has indicated, the evaluator believes certain situations have a low probability of payoff, and should be rejected. The adverse conditions largely are external to the technical content of the project itself, involving at least the general condition and prospects of the cooperative, and in many cases, the economic, institutional, and particularly the governmental environment affecting the cooperative.

The proposed Project Potential Appraisal should become the heart of the approval process. In addition to discussing this material, the project director and president would of course consider the availablity of a qualified volunteer. The following paragraphs outline a selective process of country appraisals and inter-country appraisal of types of projects, as specific tools, providing results applicable in the approval process. Such country and functional appraisals should enable more analytical discussion of the potential results of individual requested projects.

Country appraisals probably would require a total of several days of study, writing, and review. Much of the needed information, and indeed, the interpretations, are believed already to exist in some combination with field representatives, the new project director, and president. The proposal will involve writing the information out, including some increase in its extent, discussing it somewhat systematically, and employing it again as it applies to the discussion of individual applications. Consideration was given to the need to send a senior cooperatives and development specialist to each country. An argument can be made for such action, particularly in view of the somewhat limited professional training and experience of the field representatives. However, the cost of sending an additional person would be high, and it would be difficult for this consultant to contact the relevant persons in sufficient depth, to gain enough insight to apply really independently his presumed professional expertise.

In place of additional travel, the process of country appraisal and appraisal by types of projects is proposed to be executed primarily or largely by the project director and field representatives, with guidelines developed jointly with the VDC president. These persons are considered to have ample insight into the economic, administrative and other institutional processes, to prepare valuable appraisals.

VDC also may wish to retain ccasional consultants with broad development experience and knowledge of cooperatives to assist in Washington, with a few initial appraisal activities. This would help to provide initial structure for the process, and ease the burden of additional work, on the limited staff.

It is hazardous to begin to propose high and low priority activities. This properly requires additional analysis, and the combined judgement of several persons. However, to provide one illustration, the evaluator believes an effort to establish cooperative supermarkets in an urban area, in competition with private sector small shopkeepers, private sector supermarket chains, and government-sponsored food shops, is most unlikely to succeed. Provision of technical specialists to design or improve specific parts of such an operation is a doubtful activity. On the positive side, he would give high priority to feasibility analyses and analyses of administrative systems in growing cooperatives. These are sufficiently few illustrations to allow full flexibility in developing criteria and decisions within VDC.

Project Implementation

The actual conduct of projects by VDC volunteers has been excellent. Significant problems evidently have been rare. Certainly the testimonial record encountered in the direct field interviews was outstanding.

Several cases were noted in VDC files, where volunteers experienced less than the logistic support they expected, especially local transportation. The evaluator concluded that failure to assign a full-time interpreter was a significant handicap in one Bolivia case, though the project produced significant results.

A second suggestion is that volunteers be briefed to make a maximum effort to interact during their work with second and third level staff of clients. A few instances were noted, where these persons consider that the volunteers were somewhat remote. It is considered likely that most have performed very well on this point. Special effort probably is required, especially when one considers age, cultural gaps, etc. The direct motive in working with subordinate staff is of course to secure full information and interpretations, guiding the substance and details of findings, plus interpreting those recommendations or findings. The additional motive is to increase the receptivity of subordinate staff for changes, and to reduce any tendency to resist changes proposed from outside.

Volunteers should make a special effort in their written reports, to identify in-country sources of assistance for following up on recommendations, assisting in their possible detailed adaptation. This recommendation particularly arises out of the comment of several officials interviewed, that they would like a follow-up visit by the former volunteer, to further develop his work. These statements are considered complimentary, but also pose a problem for VDC. Travel is costly, and many volunteers may not be available.

The option instead is to provide for maximum follow-up by in-country technical people, both national and expatriate. The volunteer should suggest knowledgeable persons, probably some he has worked with. Management and senior staff may need these suggestions. Technical people so designated also may be more willing to exercise some initiatives, at least in reminding senior officials of the recommendations. Thus, brief notes on follow-up, toward the end of reports, may be beneficial.

Administrative Processes and Staff Development

VDC has maintained a very minimum headquarters establishment, recognized and commended by previous evaluators. This is indeed considered an accomplishment. While a few recommendations in this report involve additional analysis, it is believed the total will not alter seriously the overall economy of operations.

VDC has recently made a minor but needed administrative change, in numbering each application received in the established series, promptly on receipt, including all copies. This requires only a momentary effort, and will ease future efforts to track requests and provide rapid identification of papers. It is vital to future internal and external evaluation processes.19/

Storage space is at a premium in all offices, and papers appear about to fill available space at VDC. One source of relief, however, is to purge old files of duplicate and trivial material. There is substantial. A second step, perhaps simultaneously, would be to miniaturize the remaining old material for storage. Various technologies are available. A cutoff of five years is ample; perhaps four years of storage of hard copies is sufficient.

A final "administrative" suggestion is to prepare to claim more credit for substantive work by field representatives. This again requires a few additional pieces of paper. The time involved will be justified in supporting the VDC program in evaluations, and in individual performance reviews.

Field representatives maintain detailed notes on their contacts and discussions. These notes and informal memos would provide a ready source for desired information, believed presently to be too scattered to be usable for the desired purpose. An extract is proposed, limited to relatively solid cases of substantive work and accomplishments. This includes instances when specific issues are discussed in some detail with officials, and there is some indication the problems and issues have been at least clarified in the official's mind. A distinction is not important, whether the clarification appears actually to come from the official or the field representative. If the potential project client develops a solution, or simply clarifies and narrows the issue, that is an accomplishment and output for VDC to some extent.

The field representatives clearly are gaining significant insights into cooperative organization, management, and operations in the course of routine competent performance of duties. Parts of the recommendations in this report call on them to place parts of their experience in a more rigorous project development and review framework, and to consider specifically, development impacts. The project director presumably will assume a leading and coordinating role.

The remaining suggestion is to devote perhaps 4 - 5 days a year, presumably at Christmastime, to a planned series of conversations or informal seminars on program experience and needs. It is believed appropriate topics would rapidly be identified if the proposal is surfaced for discussion. While the idea is proposed primarily for internal staff discussion, qualified persons from AID, other agencies, or simply as available

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19/ The evaluator understands that an initial test of coherence, adequacy, consistency with the VDC mandate, etc. formerly was applied before requests were assigned numbers. Also, as noted earlier, numbers initially assigned an application sometimes were reassigned after the first application was terminated or rejected.

should be invited to present and participate in discussing individual topics. This proposal is intended to yield a significant program-strengthening benefit, and even some informal training, at slight cost to VDC.20/

Future VDC Evaluations

A thorough and objective internal evaluation system is the best primary approach to VDC evaluations. This approach is most likely to be accepted by AID, if routine VDC reports and the internal evaluations indicate a well administered and monitored program. To the mutual interest of VDC and AID, this will produce superior program results, and will minimize the interruptions and cost associated with external evaluations.

The routine processes of project development, volunteer recruitment, briefing, and project implementation will presumably be reviewed in all evaluations, to assure that these steps continue to be soundly administered. The recommendations indicated some extensions of the current VDC evaluation process, and linkage of project evaluations with the recommended "Project Potential Appraisal." Since this report has emphasized a more analytical project selection process, the VDC project selection procedures presumably should receive particular attention in VDC reports to AID for the next few years. Other topics will be selected by VDC or proposed by AID.

One year after this report, VDC should report to AID not only its routine program operations, but specifically on project evaluation and project selection processes then in place.

At the end of two years, VDC should complete an internal evaluation, including topics mutually agreed with its AID monitor. Changes in the content of evaluations, and their linkage with the "Project Potential Appraisal" should by that time begin to merit evaluation as part of the system. The project director should travel to selected countries as part of his duties, and in the process will gather data on program operations applicable to internal evaluations. This action, well performed, would not only aid in routine program administration, but provide evaluation information comparable to that collected through separate travel to the Philippines, Botswana, and Bolivia in this evaluation.

AID can decide on the basis of the two-year evaluation, what kind and content of evaluations are needed at the end of three years, and later.

Evaluation Findings and Recommendations

This report is based on an evaluation of the program of Volunteer Development Corps (VDC), a private, nonprofit organization providing short-term technical help to cooperatives and government agencies serving

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20/ In greater elaboration, if other cooperative organizations were to make a similar arrangement, staff of all might join in discussing selected topics.

cooperatives in developing countries, at their request. Coverage and intensity of the evaluation reflect initial advice to the evaluator that there had been no fundamental criticism of the VDC program. It was designed as an inquiry stressing field evaluation of the conduct and impact of projects, and intended to provide some combination of further support of the program and possible criticism, or recommendations for refinement and strengthening.

The report primarily follows a scope of work established mutually between the Agency for International Development (AID), VDC, and the evaluator. There follows a general discussion of basic elements of the VDC program, viewed as a system, leading to primary recommendations. This statement of findings does not entirely follow that outline.

Findings

The VDC program is generally sound. Conduct of the central core of the program, the actual field execution of individual projects of short-term technical assistance, has been superior. Some findings on this core activity are as follows.

Volunteers have conformed closely to their scope of work, highly pleasing clients. While many adaptations actually were made in the field from written statements of problems, such adjustments were made in a superior manner, reflecting responsiveness and the breadth of experience of volunteers.

Volunteers are considered highly qualified; respondents indeed praised them. Clients registered only a few qualifying comments, and these are considered minor. Thus, performance in selecting volunteers is regarded as superior.

The scope of nearly all projects is considered to have ample significance to justify the VDC project; respondents consider their problems highly significant.

Project results and impact are considered positive or probably very favorable in all five Botswana projects, and in six of seven Bolivia projects reviewed. Results in the six Philippines projects reviewed are more mixed. Two produced positive results, one is pending after two years, and results of three are considered doubtful or at most preventive of further incorrect actions. The performance of all the VDC volunteers involved is considered strong to superior. All instances of doubtful results can be linked with factors external to execution of the VDC project. The influence of external institutional including policy matters on the impact of projects is thus seen as very strong.

The majority to nearly all recommendations actually were adopted, in most instances. VDC evaluation reports provide a more detailed record than memory and patience of respondents in this evaluation. VDC evaluations are candid and adequate regarding adoption of recommendations.

Responde ts are able to recall recommendations adopted from nearly every project (this memory tracks closely with material in VDC files, which is more inclusive), and they consider the recommendations important. They do not, however, translate adoption of recommendations into tangible effects on major economic variables such as prices, costs, and incomes. This is not surprising, and the small, intermittent VDC projects should not be expected to have such measurable impacts, at least in the short run.

Respondents from clients say the cooperative participants strongly represent the middle income class, reach moderately or substantially into the lower income classes, and reach larger farmers, etc. only to a slight extent. AID respondents believe it is primarily a middle income class that is served, but substantially support the client responses.

The ability of VDC to recruit and assign highly qualified volunteers, who have almost universally pleased the client, is critical to a volunteer program. The VDC policy of assigning and not nominating volunteers is basic and must be supported.

VDC has been implementing less than two-thirds of the requests received and numbered. There has been a wide variety of reasons for inaction or refusal of the remainder. VDC is considered responsive. The extent of correspondence and direct consultation by field representatives is commended. Recruitment has been active, once the project merits are accepted. No explicit charges of laxity or indifference were found. Recommendations are to apply a more critical process of pre-project appraisal, before acceptance. Past refusals are not criticized.

Work of the field representatives in generating requests and guiding the program within the VDC mandate, is considered more than satisfactory. These roles are vital to the extremely decentralized program of intermittent advisory assistance, involving specialists frequently not experienced in developing countries, and involving no logistic support by AID Missions.

Project definition and not stimulation is the key role of field representatives. Consultation to further define projects may result in withdrawal, or very positively, may result in self-solution of some or all problems perceived, by the potential client.

The cost of the VDC program has escalated as a result of increased transportation, hotel, and restaurant meal costs. Virtually all alternative forms of technical assistance have a substantially higher cost, however, especially when all overhead and support elements are included. Cost effectiveness of VDC programs is considered high, especially considering the favorable conclusions of this evaluation.

Short-term technical assistance is most relevant to relatively defined topics, and not a broad process of institution building or training. VDC works to confine the projects accepted within such criteria. Nevertheless, and somewhat incidentally, the cumulative effect of associated VDC projects in some settings may have a significant institution-building effect.

VDC has adopted a plan for cooperative sponsorship and support, joining the sponsors in financial support, in policy making, and in specific operational steps. It also communicates frequently with non-sponsors in the conduct of some projects. Sponsorship by all cooperative organizations supported in part by AID grants, and their full association in policy making, etc. under the VDC policy would be a neater situation. AID may encourage this condition but should not violate the private and voluntary nature of the several organizations in the process. The present situation is less than ideal, but has proven workable.

VDC practices with respect to AID briefings are considered generally sound, with minor suggestions. The Congressional briefing process also is sound, while some suggestions are made for refinement and more specific results. The VDC program is linked favorably with one or more probable positive interests of nearly all Congressmen:

1. Technical assistance to developing countries

2. Private and voluntary development action (generally, and cooperatives specifically)

   a. Involving U.S. private and voluntary actions and/or

   b. Involving and seeking to stimulate foreign private and voluntary actions

3. Utilization/involvement of individual volunteers in technical assistance

4. Continued use of expertise of retirees

5. Self-help and participatory development actions

The VDC program is basically sound. The major and minor recommendations that follow are for further strengthening. The major group of recommendations, relating to evaluation and project selection, is not regarded critical of the past VDC program. VDC only now, after completing 200 projects by March 31, 1981, has sufficient experience to implement the proposed adjustments in a systematic manner.

Recommendations

Suggestions concerning the actual implementation of projects and selection of volunteers are minor, in view of the excellent past performance of these core functions.

The major group of recommendations rests on a conclusion that individual projects, project situations, and types of projects can be further identified to distinguish between those likely to produce a good to powerful impact,

vs. those unlikely to produce significant results. Further, the impact is as likely to be influenced by conditions external to the project itself as those directly involved in project execution. The heart of the proposed process of more critical assessment of individual applications is strengthened evaluation on completed projects. In addition to these evaluations, a selective process of country appraisals and inter-country functional appraisal is recommended.

As the first key step in processing an application, the VDC field representative should prepare a "Project Potential Appraisal" on the cooperative, its situation, and expected results of the project. This would be weighed during project selection, in relation to VDC and other experience and conditions in the country, and VDC experience in approaching the kind of cooperatives and problems involved (the country and functional appraisals, when these have been completed). The following Appraisal topics are proposed:

1. Requesting organization: Name, address, description

2. Clarification of project request including restatement of project problem situation

3. Urgency (critical issues, seasonal imperatives, etc.)

4. Role, significance of cooperative or agency, economic setting

5. Description of cooperative users (members)

6. Capability to implement expected recommendations (leadership capacity, board-staff harmony)

7. Expected effects (as related to problems) of anticipated findings: Probability of adoption, results if adopted

8. Housing, logistic support availability

9. Recommendation

Brief, written country analyses are recommended for selected countries where VDC has completed at least 6 projects and further applications are expected. These should consider the overall setting for cooperative development and their successful commercial operations. Appraisal is needed of the recent and probable performance of government institutions including policies as these affect cooperatives, and of major cooperative groupings in the country. The harmony or tensions among key agencies and leaders, and their access to higher decision makers are key elements. Others are suggested in the text.

A comparable series of functional analyses also is recommended to provide further guidance for the selection process. Experience in selected types of projects, such as agricultural marketing, food and

other consumer goods retailing, credit, housing, etc. would be reviewed and conclusions proposed about kinds of activity likely to yield good or poor results.

Both the country and functional analyses are intended to be relatively informal and strictly for internal use. Most of the needed information can come from the knowledge of VDC staff and evaluation reports. VDC also may wish to retain intermittent consultants to assist in parts of these processes.

To recapitulate, content of the recommended Project Potential Appraisal should be the central data in decisions on project acceptance. The country and functional analyses would provide complementary and reinforcing data. A few proposed additional and lesser criteria for acceptance include:

1. Need for a high level of skill and experience

2. Scale of cooperative operations

3. National availability of the required expertise

Such lesser criteria may vary in importance, depending on the balance between project applications and the resources of VDC. Finally, the ability of VDC to recruit a qualified volunteer is essential.

A strengthened evaluation process will yield much of the information needed for the recommended project selection process, as well as for continued monitoring of project execution. An expanded evaluation outline is proposed as follows:

Date

Name of Evaluator

Project number and condensed title

1. Requesting organization

2. Volunteer

3. Dates of assignment

4. Assistance requested (application)

5. External considerations

6. VDC's purpose in accepting the application

7. Volunteer's work

8. Recommendations implemented/not implemented

9. Actual and expected further impact on problems

10. Expected impact on final users

11. Persons interviewed.

Items 5, 9, and 10 will link evaluations with the corresponding Project Potential Appraisal and over time, yield information useful in future processes of project development and decisions on project applications.

Other recommendations are viewed as less significant. They are presented in the order of the body of the report.

AID must continue to grant VDC the authority, and VDC must accept the responsibility to assign volunteers without individual clearance.

VDC should review periodically the projects not selected, as guidance for project development activity. This will assist in developing program priorities, outlining recruitment potentials, and any bottlenecks.

AID needs administratively simple arrangements for both volunteer and compensated short-term assistance on specialized cooperative topics, to secure these services readily from VDC for volunteers and from one of the other cooperative organizations in other cases.

AID should not seek to direct the goals and organizational relationships among cooperative organizations, but may constructively encourage additional organizations to sponsor VDC.

VDC volunteers should consistently continue to attempt to secure an initial and a final briefing session at AID Missions. Field representatives should continue to contact Missions during each country visit. Other expatriates are a potentially valuable resource.

VDC should make more specific efforts to solicit Congressional support for cooperative actions including VDC specifically, capitalizing on its extensive program of Congressional briefings.

Individual Congressional briefings may selectively be sacrificed to save time and possibly avoid annoyance, the selections out based on the Congressman's interests, individual desire of the volunteer, repetition, etc.

VDC should acknowledge promptly the receipt of each project application it receives.

VDC should internally justify each instance of delay or omission of project evaluation, by 18 months after project completion.

VDC field representatives should continue to guide cooperatives gently toward self-solution of issues. VDC should prepare to claim credit for substantive work of field representatives in guiding potential clients toward such partial or complete self-solution of problems.

VDC should apply findings from analysis of previous experience in regulating the frequency of calls on one kind of institution, and individual ones, versus others, and in the frequency of stops in individual countries.

Volunteers should make a maximum effort to interact with second and third level staff of clients.

Volunteers should identify at the end of their reports, in-country sources of assistance available to management of the client, to help in following up, further interpretation, and possible adaptation of findings and recommendations.

VDC should number <u>each</u> request received, promptly on receipt.

VDC should consider establishing a process of 4 - 5 days of staff discussion or seminars at Christmastime, on program experience and needs.