

A.I.D. EVALUATION SUMMARY

PD-ABH-629
PART I 86103

(BEFORE FILLING OUT THIS FORM, READ THE ATTACHED INSTRUCTIONS)

IDENTIFICATION DATA

A. REPORTING A.I.D. UNIT:

USAID/Costa Rica
(Mission or AID/W Office)
(ES# 92-02)

B. WAS EVALUATION SCHEDULED IN CURRENT FY ANNUAL EVALUATION PLAN?

yes slipped ad hoc

Eval. Plan Submission Date: FY 91 Q 2

C. EVALUATION TIMING

Interim final ex post other

D. ACTIVITY OR ACTIVITIES EVALUATED (List the following information for project(s) or program(s) evaluated; If not applicable, list title and date of the evaluation report)

Project #	Project/Program Title (or title & date of evaluation report)	First PROAG or equivalent (FY)	Most recent PACD (mo/yr)	Planned LOP Cost ('000)	Amount Obligated to Date ('000)
596-0129-A	Regional Agricultural Higher Education Agricultural College for the Humid Tropical Region (EARTH)	1985	9/95	\$26.4M	\$19.2M
Local Currency equivalent \$79M					

ACTIONS

E. ACTION DECISIONS APPROVED BY MISSION OR AID/W OFFICE DIRECTOR

Action(s) Required	Name of officer responsible for Action	Date Action to be Completed
1. Evaluation report distributed to each member of the Board of Trustees and Directors.	William Baucom	11/91
2. Written responses to evaluation from College Director requested.	William Baucom	11/91
3. Continuation of external technical assistance, particularly in areas of academic support and training and college administration.	William Baucom	3/92
4. Initiation of continual process of review of mission statement, strategic issues, and actions affecting the long-term direction of the College.	José A. Zaglul	N/A

(Attach extra sheet if necessary)

APPROVALS

F. DATE OF MISSION OR AID/W OFFICE REVIEW OF EVALUATION: mo 12 day 31 yr 91

G. APPROVALS OF EVALUATION SUMMARY AND ACTION DECISIONS:

Signature	Project/Program Officer	Representative of Borrower/Grantee	Evaluation Officer	Mission or AID/W Office Director
<i>[Signature]</i>	William Baucom	José A. Zaglul	Virginia Waddell	Ronald F. Venezia
Typed Name				
Date: <i>[Signature]</i>	Date: <i>[Signature]</i>	Date: <i>[Signature]</i>	Date: <i>[Signature]</i>	
	3/25/92	4/22/92	3/28/92	

H. EVALUATION ABSTRACT (do not exceed the space provided)

The project intends to establish a specialized, 4-year international agricultural college to prepare professionals to work in the humid tropics of the Americas. The project was approved in 1985 and the institution achieved legal status in 1986. During the pre-start-up period, land was acquired for the campus, construction was planned and initiated, key personnel hired, implementation of the academic program planned and administrative policies were drafted. An educational philosophy termed "learning-by-doing" was refined and incorporated into several aspects of the design and planning of the institution. EARTH (Agricultural College of the Humid Tropical Region) began classes in March 1990. This mid-term evaluation was intended to: 1) review the process and progress of implementation; 2) assess the long-term financial viability of the College, and 3) measure the effectiveness of the organization and programs, both in terms of quality and consistency with the objectives of project design.

The team of three evaluators which visited the Project in July 1991, chose to use "strategic" rather than a "results" approach in their review, examining the logic of the institution through dialogue with directors, staff, faculty and students. Areas of inquiry centered around an examination of the central purpose of the institution, the effectiveness of the processes now in place and the financial sustainability of the College. The team concluded that "after a puzzling long gestation period, the progress of the development of EARTH, since the laying of the foundation stone in April 1989, has been quite outstanding, by any measure of comparison."

"The review also revealed the university to be in a vitally important phase of transition; one where the locus of control is shifting from groups of people who are essentially outside the institution to those that now comprise the institution itself."

"The study has been conducted at a moment when this transition is in full swing. It has revealed that, as is usually the case at this juncture in any organization's evolution, it is a time of some confusion and stress at EARTH for all parties concerned", especially when considering that there are new faculty, administrators, staff and students being incorporated to the institution constantly. A product of this transition is a level of significant uncertainty about the central purpose of the institution as well as some of the processes that are being used as the institution 'learns how to go about its business'. On the financial side, EARTH has significant capital resources but not in sufficient amounts to guarantee its future financial viability. A focused review of progress to date and specific recommendations are not included, however, except in the evaluation of financial viability. These include: a) the need for integration of financial strategies with overall strategic planning; and, b) the need for integration of EARTH fund-raising strategies with the intentions and capacities of those of its directors and trustees.

ABSTRACT

I. EVALUATION COSTS

1. Evaluation Team
Name Affiliation

Contract Number OR
TDY Person Days

Contract Cost OR
TDY Cost (US\$)

Source of
Funds

Richard Bawden, Academy for Educational
Development

75

\$60,808

Project Funded

Roberta Warren, Management Systems Int.

John Rigby, Management Systems Int.

2. Mission/Office Professional
Staff Person-Days (estimate) 10

3. Borrower/Grantee Professional
Staff Person-Days (estimate) 20

COSTS

A.I.D. EVALUATION SUMMARY PART II

J. SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (Try not to exceed the 3 pages provided)

Address the following items:

- Purpose of activity(ies) evaluated
- Purpose of evaluation and Methodology used
- Findings and conclusions (relate to questions)
- Principal recommendations
- Lessons learned

Mission or Office: RDO/USAID Costa Rica

Date this summary prepared: March 1992

Title and Date of Full Evaluation Report: Coming Down to EARTH - A Strategic Evaluation

1. Purpose of the Project. The purpose of forming the EARTH College, as stated in Project documentation, is: "To produce a professional human response base with practical and educational experience needed to address the agricultural problems of the Central America and Panama region." Specializing in agriculture of the humid tropics, EARTH is intended to produce graduates with high academic achievement, practical "hands-on" skills, sensitivity to environmental issues and preparation in the entrepreneurial aspects of farming and agriculturally related businesses.

2. Purpose of the evaluation and methodology used. This evaluation was undertaken in observance of Project planning which called for a mid-term assessment of "the progress achieved versus the original activity schedule ..., the overall growth of the institution relative to that projected at the design stage, and the financial situation of the College." The evaluation was performed when the construction of the physical plant was about 60% complete, one-fourth of the faculty was hired and the second class of students had completed about one-half of an academic year. Therefore, this evaluation focused on the process and effectiveness of the initial steps taken in building a new institution.

The methodology used was principally that of extensive dialogue with directors, academic and administrative staffs, students and financial specialists. Rather than providing prescriptive recommendations based on evaluative observations, the evaluators required faculty and administrators of the College to participate in "critical conversations" on the directions the institution is taking and worked with them to initiate "communicative action - which has the intent of exposing new insights and understandings about situations ... that will result in a motivation ... to improve them."

3. Findings and conclusions are not easily gleaned from the evaluation report. In fact, the report makes only passing reference to achievements or problems faced to date. As a strategic evaluation, the focus of the report is on the future of the institution and cites issues, which in the view of the evaluators, are critical to the future well-being of the enterprise. According to the evaluators, "In this manner, the strengths and weaknesses of the system were "self-identified", as were the opportunities and threats posed by the environment."

The report recognizes "the enviable progress of EARTH in establishing itself as a critical teaching system providing an education relevant to the management of natural resources for responsible farming in the humid tropics." However, the team also noted that in "participation in the evaluation process of faculty, administrators and students, the importance of the lack of clarity in the current strategic directions of the university and some conflicts of interpretation in the educational paradigm were apparent." They indicate some major issues recognized by the institution that need to be addressed and internal adjustments made. Issues considered important in this context include:

- The extent to which "farming systems" for the humid tropics should be a part of the teaching focus;

- The development of a paradigm and praxis by faculty and students to facilitate learning in a participative environment;
- The effectiveness and relevance of the institutions education's program as measured by its ability to attract financial support;
- The importance of allowing faculty quality time to focus on the purpose of their endeavors as well as adequate resources to allow them to communicate with other academics involved in similar inquiry;
- The importance of maintaining frequent meetings "to discuss developments in paradigm and praxis and be constantly encouraged by effective leadership as well as by both extrinsic and intrinsic incentives."

EARTH's financial future is not yet secure nor guaranteed. Full viability will be a product of: (a) the ability of financial managers to handle risk in investments well and (b) attracting additional resources in the form of scholarships and permanent endowment.

4. Principal recommendations are not included as such in the report. The evaluators were staunch in their insistence that the people directly involved in the conduct of the College must draw their own conclusions and devise their own recommendations on future actions. It is strongly hinted that the College should quickly seek its own identity, style - strategy - in order to evolve from the roots of its origin, including AID, foundation support and technical assistance which were so predominant during the formative years. In the "key themes" section of the report, a revised mission statement for the College is presented.

In the annex concerning financial viability and sustainability, two different scenarios or sets of assumptions are presented to illustrate factors of future financial soundness. Evaluators recommend close integration between strategic planning and fund-raising. It is also noted that success in the financial area will be closely related to the effectiveness of the College and its ability to establish supportive relations with international funding sources which particularly value and support the work of EARTH.

K. ATTACHMENTS (List attachments submitted with this Evaluation Summary; always attach copy of full evaluation report, even if one was submitted earlier)

Complete evaluation report
Letter of response by the Director of EARTH

ATTACHMENTS

L. COMMENTS BY MISSION, AID/W OFFICE AND BORROWER/GRANTEE

In the portion of the evaluation which addressed financial viability (Appendix 6) the evaluation report addressed the scope of work directly. The strategic approach to the remainder of the evaluation was not envisioned by the Mission and early drafts of the report were practically rejected by USAID/Costa Rica as unresponsive to the scope of work. The evaluation in the main tends to pose questions and raise issues relating to the future of the institution rather than focusing on progress to date in building the College. This approach, although of some interest to both the Mission and EARTH, made the evaluation report deficient, only marginally acceptable.

The evaluation team spent adequate time at the College, did extensive interviews and took voluminous notes. Additionally, they held informal workshop type sessions with EARTH staff which generated interest, productive debates and critical thinking on the campus.

The Chief of Party virtually refused to offer evaluative comment and recommendations in the evaluation report. The strategic focus of the report which dominated in early drafts, was not expected by the Mission to be presented in lieu of a review of progress in the College.

The examination of strategic issues and preliminary planning conducted by the evaluators, and explained at length in the report were a useful and productive exercise for the College. However, this approach differs from the more conventional concept of mid-term project evaluation. The College has begun a process of review and examination of strategic issues of the type suggested in the evaluation report. This Mission supports this process of continuous critical review as a valuable technique of institutional development.

MISSION COMMENTS ON FULL REPORT