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WALKING AN OLD PATH IN NEW SHOES:

Anthropology Returns to A.I.D.

by

William H. Jansen II

### Author's Statement

William H. Jansen II is presently the Social Analysis Advisor to the Agency for International Development's Philippine mission. Previously, he performed a similar role for the agency's Asia Bureau in Washington. Prior to working with A.I.D., he was a Research Associate at the University of Alaska doing work in connection with the Alaskan land claims settlement and he has also studied socio-cultural factors affecting economic policies and programs among Eskimo in Canada. This paper is a version of one presented at the 1977 meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology held in San Diego.

### Abstract

There have been changes in the Agency for International Development that prompted a growing social awareness in the development process. These changes have also caused A.I.D. to hire anthropologists to assist in the preparation and review of development projects. This paper examines the roles anthropologists are taking within the agency's social structure; the expectations of the roles; and some characteristics of the agency's structure which affect the roles of an anthropologist. As might be expected, there are problems arising from this applied setting, both from the agency's perspective and from the perspective of the anthropologist. Nevertheless, the present circumstances in A.I.D. offer the applied anthropologist the potential to become part of the decision-making process supporting development projects.

In the spring of 1976, the Agency for International Development (A.I.D.) began hiring social anthropologists for regular, "direct-hire" positions. This action represented a major change not only in personnel policy, but also a change in the stated focus of the agency's developmental program. Anthropologists, theoretically, were no longer to be periodic contractors fulfilling a very specific and temporary agency need. Direct-hire anthropologists were planned to become a regular part of the agency's decision-making process concerning development project planning, design and review.

That social anthropologists are becoming involved with federal government activities or within A.I.D. is nothing particularly new. Certainly the work of Margaret Lantis, George Foster, Glynn Cochrane among many others attest to anthropology's long term involvement with federal agencies. However, the recently established relationship between A.I.D. and anthropology possesses qualities which are unique for developmental anthropology, partially because of a change in personnel policy within A.I.D. and partially due to the agency's changing approaches to development. The context of

new anthropological employment with A.I.D. appears significantly different to how anthropology was used in the past. Differences appear in the scope of the present role now being defined and in the potential for what that role could become in the future.

In the direct-hire position, the social anthropologist is envisioned as a person who could provide the agency with a social perspective for the developmental projects it may support financially. The basis for providing this social perspective lies in the anthropologist's social training and in the opportunity to perform social investigations in the field for specific projects which are being planned or evaluated.

Actually, the true role of the anthropologist within the agency is not defined. Most old line bureaucrats and administrators are very much uncertain as to how an anthropologist should operate in their arena. Even among the original proponents advocating the turn to anthropology as a discipline which is valuable to A.I.D. work, bureaucrats have differing visions of what the anthropologist will do.

How the role of the direct-hire anthropologist in

A.I.D. is developing constitutes the major concern of this paper. The way in which an anthropologist functions in the direct-hire position, of course, will vary somewhat between branches of the agency. Nevertheless, a common pattern exists and that pattern is discussed here. One other factor that significantly affects the role of the anthropologist is the manner in which he or she was recruited into the direct-hire post. There are two means possible: entry through the GS system (civil service) and entry through the International Development Intern (I.D.I.) program which is part of the foreign service.

The GS system is usually reserved for relatively senior people who have established career experience and who step into relatively high level slots in the bureaucracy. This method is a means by which the agency has the opportunity to acquire senior level administrators (from a social science discipline in this case) quickly, without having to wait for them to "rise from the ranks." The I.D.I. program is the method now established to meet the regular staffing needs and tends to focus on younger people for more junior-level positions.

It is the anthropologist who enters the agency through the I.D.I. recruitment method which receives much of the focus of this paper. I do this firstly because it is the method I am most familiar with, and secondly because I feel this method of entry into an applied work setting in A.I.D. presents both special problems and a special potential (given the character of the social system that is the agency itself).

In discussing the role of the direct-hire anthropologist, I will begin with a brief description of events which occurred in A.I.D. that led to the decision to seek anthropologists as regular employees, through either recruitment method.

#### A Rebirth of Social Interest in A.I.D.

Much of the early life of the Agency for International Development was devoted to very classical approaches to economic development. This devotion often appeared in the form of large capital projects such as dams and power plants. Frequently, the focus of economic development lay primarily in macro-economic issues like balance of payment deficits, foreign exchange reserves, Gross National Product, industrial

sector output, agriculture sectoral production or institution building. Development was a realm in which the economist was king.

Beginning at least as early as the middle 60's, a concern was being voiced in Washington (and elsewhere) that the classical approach to economic development which tended to measure production alone brought about a growing disparity in developing countries between the "haves" and the "have nots." Questions were asked about what percentage of the population in developing countries actually benefited from development. People increasingly began to notice more and more elements in economic development that appeared to rest largely within the broader realm of society as a whole. The "trickle-down" theory of development was beginning to lose adherents.

In 1966 and 1967, this concern about the distribution of the benefits of economic development became manifested in Congressional amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act. These amendments stressed developmental approaches which would assure a maximum participation of people in the development process and in development

benefits. The same amendments also officially recognized the existence of differences in the needs, desires and capacities of the people in various countries. A greater attention was being given to people and their country-specific qualities.

Nevertheless, the traditional approach to development remained strong and continued to represent the major emphasis in A.I.D. activities. Congress criticized these activities rather graphically in 1971 by rejecting A.I.D.'s program and holding back funding for a year. The criticism<sup>from</sup> Congress and others (see Owens and Shaw 1972) surrounded the "trickle-down" approaches' apparent inability to actually improve the lives of the vast majority of people in developing countries. Doubt within the agency itself was increased by failures of specific projects to reach their stated goals in Vietnam.

Spawned by growing criticism and by a desire to try a developmental approach which begins with people of poorer means (the "poor majority") as a focus and which uses the economic and social "well being" of the poor as building blocks, the Congress acted again. Further amendments were made to the Foreign Assistance Act

in 1973 and 1975 by the House Committee on International Relations. These amendments specifically targeted the work of A.I.D. to be the "poor majority" in the rural areas of developing countries. Projects were to be designed to meet the needs of the "rural poor" and to provide them with direct benefits (a departure from the indirect benefit rationale of the traditional approach).

Unfortunately, Congress offered A.I.D. little information as to how this orientation to the "poor majority" in non-western countries might be accomplished. During 1975, the agency examined ways in which it could comply with or implement the wishes of Congress to reach the rural poor. An important action in that examination was taken by one high ranking administrator and several colleagues. This action amounted to a realization that if development projects were going to actually reach and involve rural poor, project plans would have to reflect an understanding of local conditions, both economically and socially.

Social analysis provided a means for acquiring that understanding. Some even felt that social analysis

could also help to predict the likely incidence of benefit from a project given a knowledge of the social setting. The hopes for what social analysis of projects could provide the agency became immortalized as an appendix in an agency handbook explaining new design and documentation requirements for development projects. The appendix gave birth to a formal need for what was termed "social soundness analysis." Social soundness analysis was also identified as a major way the agency could provide evidence of their efforts to follow the will of the Congress.

Once the option to use social analysis as one way to change the path of U. S. sponsored development had been decided upon, a connection between social analysis and anthropology was soon made. The reasons for this connection are many. One may well be anthropology's reputation for being a discipline experienced in the study of non-western peoples. Another reason lies in the fact that an anthropologist was doing contract work with a section of A.I.D. during the formative period of responding to the wishes of Congress. This anthropologist even offered advice as to the uses and values

inherent in social analysis while the handbook for project documentation was written. Perhaps the most significant single connection between social analysis needs in A.I.D. and the discipline of anthropology came from a statement made by the same high ranking administrator which expressed the desire to have anthropologists in as many countries as possible.

Following the social tendencies of many bureaucracies, the words of a major leader of the agency prompted a flurry of activity within the personnel section. The search for direct-hire anthropologists began.

One Response to the Social Interest: Anthropologist I.D.I.'s

Among all the means to obtain regular employees, the International Development Intern program represents the formal method the agency has to staff itself in mass. To respond to the desire to have direct-hire anthropologists, the agency turned largely to the I.D.I. program as the avenue it generally uses for recruitment from all fields.

The I.D.I. program is a system which is designed to recruit individuals with a general knowledge of one

field which is deemed of use to the agency. Previously, these fields have included education, agricultural sciences, international relations, management-administration, finance-accounting, health, economics, or contracting. Most individuals recruited have bachelors level university training, but several have masters degrees. Doctoral level expertise has been a rare appearance among I.D.I's (although recent trends show an increase in the number of Ph. D.'s represented in the program).

In theory, the I.D.I. program is a two year training period during which the participant receives both classroom and on-the-job exposure to the various operations of the agency. The impact of the program is that the agency receives a person with some specialized skills and then attempts to train the individual, at least in part, as a generalist knowledgeable of the varied mechanizations of the agency. In practice, the intern is viewed as a trainee who is to learn from specific veteran individuals with several years of experience in one or more functions of the agency.

This internship lasts ~~two~~ years, after which the intern loses the trainee status and is considered a

full-fledged officer, holding a regular position. The regular position which the intern is to eventually occupy is his or her "target" position. For anthropologists, "target" positions have been identified either as social science officers or rural development officers.

Indicative of government bureaucratic policy generally, the I.D.I. program functions to indoctrinate the intern with a particular system and to place that person in his pre-existing niche within that system. Unfortunately, the anthropologist as an I.D.I. does not accommodate well to that program and problems develop. Underlying the vast majority of these problems is the stark fact that the anthropologist has no pre-existing niche in the system. He or she has to carve one out from the granite of existing and sometimes hostile bureaucratic traditions.

There are virtually no veteran employees with anthropological training to instruct the newcomer in the ways of applied anthropology in A.I.D. More important still, the agency does not really know how to use anthropologists. Instead, A.I.D. appears to be looking very suspiciously at its recently acquired anthropological

few to show the agency the value of anthropology. The anthropologist I.D.I. begins with a label of a trainee, while at the same time he or she must introduce social analysis into a bureaucratic system with a fixed operating procedure (of which anthropology is not a part).

Nevertheless, the anthropologist does receive one very important value from entering A.I.D through the I.D.I. program. I.D.I.'s are given an official sanction to investigate the various functions of the agency as their interest dictates. This allows the anthropologist the time and the freedom to explore the agency for the purpose of doing an ethnography of A.I.D. Without a knowledge of the agency itself, its requirements and its values, an effective input from applied anthropologists is much more difficult to achieve.

The Practicing A.I.D. Anthropologist: Role Dilemmas at the Birth of a Relationship

Now, let us turn to the direct-hire anthropologist once he or she begins to function with A.I.D. Indicated above is the fact that anthropologists are very new in the roles they now occupy as direct-hire employees. These roles are generally new both to the anthropologists involved and to the agency. Perhaps this newness is the

dominant factor shaping the present relationship between the agency and anthropology.

As noted previously, A.I.D. has adopted a policy to use social analysis in project design and review, but it has no common approach for implementing that policy. One of the very first tasks the practicing A.I.D. anthropologist must do is to define how he or she can function within the day-to-day affairs of the agency. Senior administrators responsible for the performance of their sections, divisions or bureaus frequently look to their newly acquired anthropologist to tell them just what the anthropologist's job should be.

Therefore, the initial job of the anthropologist is actually to define his role as a social science officer (or as a rural development officer) for the bureaucracy. This definition of a role does not cease after the first few months; it is a continuing process. Roughly 95% of the agency personnel with whom one deals has no idea what "social soundness" analysis actually is, or how the anthropologist accomplishes this mysterious action. Even more important, the agency veterans are uncertain about what to do with such an analysis

once it is available. The role the anthropologist defines for him or herself must include not only demonstrating what an applied social analysis is, but also showing how information from an applied analysis can be a valuable tool for project planning and how this tool can be incorporated into the regular process of project planning.

A factor which complicates the attempt by anthropologists to define their role in the agency is a widespread skepticism among veteran employees of the value of "social soundness" analysis and anthropologists. Bureaucracies tend to be resistant to change, and the new direction in development adopted by the agency which led to the institutionalization of "social soundness" analysis represents change. Consequently, the anthropologist is faced not only with defining a role; he or she is also continually forced to defend his or her existence. The social science officer has very little legitimacy within the agency social system. The position of a social science officer carries no value in itself, unlike the positions of loan officer, economist, legal advisor, or health planner.

The fires of skepticism are fueled by some employees with long government experience and who remember working with anthropologists in earlier government contexts. Much of this memory is based upon time spent in the military administration of the Pacific following World War II. Other employees recall first-hand experience with contracting anthropologists in specific developmental programs in the 50's and early 60's. The cumulative effect of the employees' earlier experience with anthropologists is essentially negative. They remember anthropologists not providing answers to questions when administrators needed them. They also remember a report sitting on their desk after months of waiting, a report which they did not understand and could not use.

Many of these employees feel anthropology has only an academic value--being out of place in government. Like most lay-people, agency personnel consider anthropology to be homogeneous within their definition of the discipline. Few recognize differing interests within the discipline and applied anthropology represents an unknown.

which economic and financial variables have played in much of the agency's operations. Even now, the amount of time devoted to often heated discussions of economic and financial variables affecting a project frequently occupy 90% of the time in project review meetings. The numbers of people representing economic and financial factors also tend to dominate committee composition. Of an eight member committee, five commonly represent economic and financial considerations. Since these two factors have dominated the development field in the past, individuals are initially skeptical of relatively new variables invading their traditional conceptual "territory."

The anthropologist's attempts to demonstrate the value of applied anthropology are also made difficult because of another factor. Because the social science officer position is new in the social system of the agency, most of the other officers or employees are uncertain as to how to interact with the position on the job--the office-to-office formalities are lacking. The effect is that much work goes on as usual (when there was no social science officer) and applied social analysis is often denied a meaningful role in project design.

Role definition by the anthropologist must also include building a proscribed pattern for relating to existing offices and their part in the project planning process.

One of the most imposing hurdles facing the direct-hire anthropologist on the path to establishing a role for anthropology in A.I.D. is the label of an International Development Intern (I.D.I.). If the anthropologist was recruited through the I.D.I. program, the I.D.I. status carries with it an expected role and a pre-defined identity within the social system of A.I.D. I.D.I.'s are seen as being young and inexperienced. They have an agency status as a trainee which is relatively low. Frequently I.D.I.'s are considered as very transitory, moving from office to office while "learning the ropes."

The I.D.I. image engendered in the minds of veteran employees complicates the attempts of an I.D.I. anthropologist to get social analysis and anthropology taken seriously. Why should a high ranking administrator listen to a trainee (who normally would be learning from the administrator) about how social analysis can be used? For example, pressure is often exerted to speed up the processing of a project and a social

frequently seems as a dispensable item. If I.D.I. anthropologists argue that the project appears to precipitate social consequences that should be investigated even if that investigation will take more time, the listening audiences tend to minimize the argument of an inexperienced trainee. The suggestions of an I.D.I. (of any discipline) are likely to carry the least amount of weight when compared to the suggestions of veteran employees with a much higher status in the society of the agency.

Within the social system of A.I.D., an I.D.I. lacks the authority to communicate. As a trainee, the I.D.I. is present in the agency to observe and to learn. Performance of major tasks or responsibilities are normally beyond the sphere of an I.D.I.'s experience. The anthropologist I.D.I., in contradiction to the traditional social identity for an I.D.I., has to teach and demonstrate the values of "social soundness" analysis to high ranking administrators since social analysis talent is very scarce.

And yet, as we have seen, the anthropologist I.D.I. lacks an established channel to communicate to ranking

administrators. That channel has to be created. Fortunately, the social system of the agency does offer a means to develop a basis for I.D.I.- senior administrator communication. A.I.D., like many federal agencies, honors a set of internal values.

One of the most important values that leads to recognition of the authority to communicate is the "expert" label. If one is identified as an "expert" in some area, the agency values deposit an almost instant legitimacy on that person. The fact that most bureaucrats are in essence generalists bespeaks a need to rely upon specialist "experts." Because of his or her training in anthropology and the lack of social analysts within the agency, the anthropologist I.D.I. can utilize the "expert" label to gain sufficient credibility to communicate meaningfully.

Once an operational role for an anthropologist begins to develop, the anthropologist gains important steps toward the achievement of full acceptance as a functional part of A.I.D.'s project design and review process. This is a desirable and necessary goal if anthropological insights are to make a regular contribution

to agency decision-making. Nevertheless as this goal is approached, the anthropologist is faced with other role dilemmas that represent age-old concerns about an applied work setting.

When a social analysis is requested for a project, there is frequently very little time given for the analysis to be completed. Many veteran employees feel that an understanding of a project is possible within one to two weeks. For administrative purposes, this may be so. But to explain that a social analysis takes much more time is not an easy task. The ever-present government deadline also helps to shorten the time available to do field work. As a result, anthropological methods suffer from an enforced brevity in the field (commonly between one to two months). Part of the role dilemma the A.I.D. anthropologist must face is the modification of some of his or her intense data collection practices-- practices which are closely tied to an anthropological identity.

With an increased acceptance of the anthropologist in the agency's work comes an increasing belief by others that the anthropologist is an agency person. The

anthropologist at this point loses some of his or her identity as an anthropologist and becomes individual "x" of the agency. From the point of view of the regular agency employees, the agency person identity represents an honor bestowed upon the anthropologist.

But with this honor of acceptance comes a hidden danger. An agency person is expected to be loyal to the interests of the agency or their particular division within the agency. While the definition of agency or division loyalty varies from individual to individual, part of this loyalty frequently involves presenting material supporting a project as favorably as possible (a very logical operating procedure since project documents are in effect proposals for funding and anthropologists are well aware of the importance of the proper wording in the petition for funds). Part of this theme of presenting projects and issues favorably often includes optimistic predictions of a project's potential and a tacit aversion to critical statements.

Therefore, the anthropologist doing a social analysis for a project can be subject to indirect pressure to present the analysis in an uncritical fashion. As

the anthropologist becomes more accepted as an agency person and identified as a member of the agency social system, the pressure to be supportive can become even stronger.

Some agency personnel who have come to think of the anthropologist not so much as an anthropologist, but rather as an agency person, appear dismayed or even hurt by a critical social analysis. Using the value system of the agency, there are people who judge momentarily that they have been betrayed by a critical report.

This situation creates a new role dilemma based upon whether the anthropologist is seen as performing the role of an applied anthropologist in A.I.D. or if he or she is viewed as occupying the role of an agency person. In the eyes of some agency personnel, the two roles can be seen as an either-or proposition (the two roles being mutually exclusive).

An A.I.D. anthropologist may tend to become strongly subject to the desires and wants of the agency under these covert pressures. As is common to many applied settings, such a circumstance carries the potential for

anthropologist to lose the objectivity necessary for unbiased social analysis and for the possibility of compromising the ethical standards for applied anthropology. Ethical considerations are nothing new to applied anthropology and applied work in A.I.D. is no exception. Nevertheless, the A.I.D. anthropologist must walk a narrow line allowing acceptance within the agency while also maintaining the identity of a professional anthropologist.

Prospects for the Future: Anthropology and A.I.D.

Despite what appears to be rather shaky beginnings, there is a place for anthropology as a regular component of A.I.D. operations. The ideal to make U.S. financed international development more responsive to indigenous settings and to needs felt by people creates a natural atmosphere for contributions from anthropology. With a Congress that is concerned about attain<sup>ing</sup> this ideal, A.I.D. is committed to use a variety of means to reach the goal of people-sensitive development. Anthropology remains one of the "chosen" disciplines by which the agency hopes to make the real and the ideal, one.

The commitment to a new developmental philosophy

in A.I.D. entails the use of social analysis in project design. Action on the involvement of anthropologists as social analysts for projects is just starting. In time, and assuming anthropology remains in favor, A.I.D. will have to acquire more direct-hire applied anthropologists. There will also be contractual needs for social analysis on projects which will have to be met from outside the ranks of regular agency personnel. A.I.D., then, has the potential of bringing applied anthropology (both in direct-hire and contractual contexts) into the realm of international development on a scale quite distinct from past involvements.

Perhaps the factor possessing the greatest ramifications for applied anthropology is the ability for anthropologists to enter A.I.D. as direct-hire employees. In doing so, anthropologists have the potential of being involved with project decision-making on a very close basis. Contractual work, by its nature, tends to remain in the periphery of agency policy and decision making. The direct-hire anthropologist would not only have an advisory function, but also a voice in the decision-making process. Realistically speaking, that

voice will not be the only voice, nor will it be dominant. I don't believe it should be. Other disciplines are and will continue to have important roles in decision-making. But anthropology has just as much to contribute as any one of the others.

The ability for an applied anthropologist to have an active part in decision-making is a controversial issue and one which has ethical overtones. It is not even a new issue for the Society of Applied Anthropology. But the context in which anthropology was re-introduced to A.I.D. obviously will direct anthropologists within the agency's ranks to positions with a bearing upon decision-making that are uncommon within the discipline.

In the past, some have argued that such a position is a desirable one for applied anthropologists, while others have not. Whatever one's own feelings on the matter, applied work as a direct-hire A.I.D. employee must involve a resolution of this issue. Certainly, the potential involvement of anthropology regularly in decision-making for development projects offers new opportunities for applied anthropology and new opportunities rarely appear without risk.

Judging the present receptivity of the agency to social analysis, the realization of becoming a meaningful part of the decision-making process will be quite slow in coming. Anthropology faces a long battle for acceptance within the ranks of A.I.D. prior to any such realization. In the meantime, opportunities will continue to exist for applied anthropology in A.I.D. in the form of social analysis for development projects. These opportunities will probably even grow in the near future.

Applied anthropology in A.I.D., as was noted above, is not without dangers that include threats to one's analytical objectivity and to the ethical code for applied anthropology. With care, the dangers and methodological short-cuts necessitated by governmental deadlines can be managed. The struggle for an anthropological approach to make a meaningful contribution to agency operations is a more difficult problem. To this problem, there are no easy answers.

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