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Opportunities for Increased Involvement
of Small Universities in AID's
Development Assistance Programs

by
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In the published program for this conference, my remarks come under the heading, Problems and Constraints in AID/BIFAD/University Relationships. However, I hope not to dwell at length on the somewhat negative terms, "problems" and "constraints." To be sure, we need to define these reasonably clearly in order to identify solutions. At the same time, I have learned from over 20 years of development experience, more than half of it in the field, that we all need to maintain a fundamental optimism about the development process. That is, we need to have confidence in our ability to work successfully with developing country people to accelerate their progress toward a better quality of life. In this more optimistic vein, therefore, I will present a few ideas which I hope may help AID and the universities to strengthen what has become, since Title XII, a much improved relationship.

As I understand the purpose of this conference, we are seeking ways to expand the participation of the smaller agricultural universities in AID's development programs. Most of my comments apply also to "less-experienced" universities, although these are not necessarily synonymous with "small" universities. For convenience, however, I will use the term "small" or "smaller" to include both the small and less-experienced. Also, in order to bring the discussion within manageable limits, I will confine my remarks to country projects and programs, not CRSPs or the placement of AID-financed participant trainees.

The projects which AID finances cover a wide range of ecological zones, crops, livestock, land tenure practices and cultures. Within this diversity, however, one can discern a few fairly standard kinds of projects suitable for planning and implementation with resources available in the agricultural universities and associated extension services. The classical institution-building project calls for advice and assistance to the agriculture faculty of an LDC university with the objective of establishing its capacity to carry out, with mainly indigenous resources, its role in research, extension and education. More frequently, AID is called upon to assist in establishing or improving lower level institutions which train extension officers and other technical personnel. Farmer training may also be an element in these programs. There are a substantial number of research projects as well, which invariably have development of national research capacity as a longer term objective. Increasingly, they are oriented toward a farming systems approach in which farmers' aspirations and constraints become the guiding focus of the research effort. Lastly, there are a variety of production-oriented projects which range from seed multiplication to water and range management, credit and marketing.

While the disciplinary backgrounds, and the skill and experience levels vary widely from project to project, the resource requirements are usually fairly standard. Almost without exception, each project calls for a full time Team Leader, or Chief of Party, who has specific professional skills plus the administrative, management and leadership capacity to maintain team cohesiveness and productivity

and to develop effective relationships with host country counterparts. In addition, most project teams require two or three up to perhaps ten or more additional full time field personnel in specific areas of research, extension or education. Varying numbers of short-term professional staff complement the field team. All of these people, especially the Chief of Party and other long term personnel should be, at a minimum, technically proficient and up to date, and able to plan research curriculum and other programs. Above all, they should have the ability to plan, and to act as catalysts for institutional development in their respective fields of expertise.

To support this field presence, strong technical and administrative backstopping are required from the campus. For example, technical personnel in the field frequently do not have ready access to state-of-the-art publications, and need the support of their campus-based colleagues. Frequently, some aspects of a field research problem require facilities available on the home campus. With respect to administration, even where AID provides logistic support in the field, it is a major effort to mount, prepare, transport and support a team of professionals overseas. Faced with personnel cuts, AID in fact is placing increased responsibility on contracting universities for procurement and shipment of project commodities, hiring of local support personnel, housing and equipment maintenance. Some projects also require universities to select, prepare, and place participant trainees and to monitor their progress. The difficulties involved in running all of these support activities from thousands of miles

away and in an unfamiliar administrative and cultural context are formidable, and are frequently underestimated.

While I cannot speak for AID, I think I understand some of the reasons why some AID managers may be hesitant about engaging a smaller university to take full responsibility for a project. First, it is less likely that a smaller university will have on its staff a Chief of Party candidate with proven credentials. (Parenthetically, I might note that recent experience suggests that the even larger universities are short of this species as well.) Secondly, even small projects place major demands on the faculty of a smaller university, relative to its size. The problem is not limited to initial staffing of the project: four and six year projects require replacement personnel as well. The problem of depth is not limited to field staffing; it also affects technical and administrative backstopping. Many of the smaller universities--especially the ones which try to cover a wide range of disciplines-- have no Ph.D. programs and, consequently, somewhat limited research and technical backuop capability. On the other hand, universities which do have depth in one or two areas may find it difficult to provide the broader range of resources usually required on an AID project. Third, and finally, smaller universities also are less likely to have the administrative depth and experience needed to mount and effectively support even a modest-sized project. You are all familiar with cases where programs are run out of the hip pocket of a part-time Director of International Affairs.

My purpose in the foregoing comments is not to criticize. What I do suggest is that smaller universities need perhaps to analyze their resources and characteristics more carefully, with the objective of making a realistic assessment of the most appropriate extent and--this is important--~~form~~ of their participation in AID's overseas programs. I emphasize the word "form" because I think we all may have some unrealistic expectations with respect to the nature and extent of participation by smaller institutions.

Some of the smaller universities have tried competing for contracts, head-to-head with the larger universities. The results--or lack thereof--have been frustrating. Although there may be an occasional success in winning a contract, my personal view is that open competition is a losing game, unless a university has specialized expertise required by a particular project and the administrative capacity to support it in the field. Too many of AID's constraints and those of the government generally come into play in the competitive situation. First, the Agency is not permitted to limit competition for contracts. There is no set-aside for small or minority educational institutions, as there is for small business; nor is there any legal basis on which BIFAD could limit source lists to smaller universities. Furthermore, although we are certainly sensitive that the smaller universities "want in," as one university president put it, AID Missions and LDC governments insist on tapping

the best available resources for their programs, whatever the source. Therefore, each source list is likely to include several universities with particular competence and depth in the areas required by the project, if it is to be credible and accepted by AID Missions. Second, AID's programming style tends to design projects larger than is comfortable relative to the resource base of a single small institution. I see no reversal in this trend, and for good administrative reasons, projects are likely to get still larger--and fewer. Third, AID does not--for good reasons--break projects into smaller pieces for contracting to separate institutions. This would make a simply horrendous administrative burden in Washington and would introduce insurmountable complexities in field operations.

It has been suggested from time to time that one solution to the constraints posed by the legal requirement for competition would be a small institution or a minority institution set-aside. In my opinion, there are much more effective ways of usefully engaging the strengths of the smaller universities. Set-asides would be resisted by most field Missions, and the result is likely to be that the projects set aside would be the smaller, more difficult projects in countries with less desirable political and economic climates. Establishing a good track record under these circumstances would be all the more difficult. To summarize, I do not think that participation by single small universities in the present competitive process will lead to consistent success, optimal matching of

university resources with AID requirements, or general satisfaction with the results. As I implied earlier, expectations in regard to direct contracting for entire projects may need to be revised to a realistic level.

A second organizational pattern has been for the smaller universities to join forces in a formal consortium. This has been relatively successful in terms of contract awards, but I understand there are reservations--both on the part of some member universities and AID--concerning the extent of institutional involvement and identification which this arrangement permits under current operating styles.

Although it may come as a surprise to some of you, I see a continuing role for the formal consortia. With all their disadvantages, real and perceived, they have provided useful organizing points for smaller universities. Like it or not, the administrative strengths being provided by some consortium offices can reduce significantly the ad hoc coping and administrative headaches which projects present for inexperienced and thin university administrations. I do think, however, that present consortium relationship patterns could be flexed and improved to the benefit of small universities. There may be some advantages to smaller universities in different patterns of consortium membership than now exist. For example, it may be to the advantage of a university to change its present affiliation or to consider membership in more than one consortium.

A third approach which has been attempted more frequently over the past year is for one or more smaller universities to associate formally with one or two large universities in making contract proposals. On several occasions last year, BIFAD in fact attempted to have the criteria for evaluation of proposals include a factor which would encourage this type of participation, but AID's lawyers determined that this practice was not permissible. Fortunately, the university community has responded in a reasonably creative way to the general concept, and there have been at least two successful proposals involving large/small university partnership. This approach has many advantages. It provides an opportunity for small universities to contribute from their strength to one or two specific areas of subject matter required by a project, rather than attempting to meet at a competitive level the full range of resources a project may require. Also, rather than being committed contractually to fill specified positions over the 5 year or longer life of project, the partnership arrangement can provide flexibility. For example, assume that the initial staffing of a research/extension project includes a researcher from a smaller partner university. It may well be that at the end of this research person's tour of duty, there is no qualified replacement for him or her from that university, but there is an extension person available who could fill a position which had been encumbered initially by a person from the larger university. Another advantage of the partnership kind of arrangement is that it allows flexibility to tailor the relationship to provide for as much technical and administrative involvement and leadership as the universities agree is appropriate. These relationships need not be fixed at the outset

for life of contract; they can be altered as project requirements and university resources and experience change over time. A somewhat related point, and a rather practical one, is that sharing of back-stopping responsibilities also implies sharing in AID's reimbursement for overhead expenses. Finally, the overseas project operation itself provides a focal point for less experienced staff from both small and large universities to strengthen their credentials for more extensive involvement.

Before I outline what I believe would be a better environment for engaging university resources in AID's overseas programs, let me summarize succinctly what I have suggested in the foregoing remarks.

- There is a low probability that single smaller universities will achieve a satisfactory level of participation through the competitive process. We may all be faulted for having or encouraging unrealistic expectations in this regard.
- The prospects for limiting competition are not good, and would probably not be to the long term benefit of either AID's programs or the smaller universities.
- The formal consortium mechanism, although it has limitations, does provide an effective means of involving smaller universities. Present consortia relationships should not be regarded as immutable, however.

- Partnership arrangements for specific projects or countries involving both small and large institutions offer the most possibilities for fruitful participation by smaller universities and indeed for larger ones. Some of this can occur now, but AID could encourage more cooperation by revising its programming and contracting policies and procedures to provide a more conducive environment.

Let me elaborate on the kind of partnership arrangement I have in mind. Although the developing world is diverse, and wide variations should be expected, the model set of relationships would look something like the following.

- For each country program or set of programs for a fairly well defined agro-climatic and cultural zone of manageable size, there would be one or two principal universities. The university or universities would be expected to provide overall leadership for a significant portion of the technical and administrative resources needed over the life of the program. Included in this concept would be home campus research, library and other technical resources in support of the program.
- The principal universities might also be expected to have special capacity in terms of cultural, language and area studies which would be available not only for social science components of the overseas program, but also for preparing agricultural scientists from all the universities on the

project team for their field assignments. They would also be expected to build the principal long-term linkages with the host country and its institutions. All of this would have obvious implications for use of strengthening or support grant funds, as well as for the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding which AID's Administrator has proposed as the cornerstone of the Agency's relationships with cooperating universities.

- Allied with the principal university, there could be one or more universities which would participate in the program according to their areas of strength. Such an area could be represented by one outstanding individual scientist, or it could be the entire extension component in a larger research/extension program. Allied universities might look forward to a long term association with the program, or their resource pattern may match only a shorter term segment of it. The identity and number of allied universities may change over time as program requirements evolve.

I visualize the relationship between the principal university and the allied universities to be one which integrates the allied universities into an administrative framework which permits assumption of technical leadership and administrative support responsibilities appropriate to the university's contribution and capacity. Such an arrangement should also be designed to encourage development of more direct relationships between the allied universities and the various units of AID.

- Finally, there are the existing specialized consortia such as UNIFOR, the Consortium for International Forestry, CICIP (the Consortium for International Crop Protection) and CIFAD (the Consortium for International Fisheries and Aquaculture Development). These, and the CRSP entities, need to be integrated into the foregoing pattern on a regular, planned basis.

To achieve the kind of relationship I have just described, certain adjustments in policy, procedure and attitude on the part of all concerned would be useful. I will mention first some adjustments in AID's programming practices which I think would help. I will then comment on three general procedural approaches to establishment of university/AID program relationships and how we all might make these procedures work better.

On the programming side, AID needs to plan more of its country (or where it makes more sense, regional) agricultural development programs in terms of their probable evolution over significant periods of time--say ten to twenty years. A few Missions are already doing this, and I am convinced that it is possible to make, for many countries or regions, reliable and reasonably specific projections regarding the probable areas of AID involvement over longer periods of time. Major food crops, major export crops, major ecological, human resources, institutional, and economic constraint can be identified and do not fade that quickly into insignificance.

In addition, AID needs to "package" these program projections into a format that facilitates the engagement of the best qualified combination of university resources for the long haul. The prevailing budget, programming and contracting procedures result, unfortunately, in each country agricultural program being broken down into several discrete relatively short term project units, each of which is designed separately, contracted separately (usually to different contractors) and managed separately. Within limits, the present system can be adapted to accomplish reasonable matching of university resources and their long term involvement. However, Agency policy to encourage this approach is not adequate, and what is being accomplished is mainly the result of personal initiatives on the part of AID officers on BIFAD Staff.

While the foregoing adjustments in AID programming practice would be useful, there is much that can be done to achieve the kind of institutional relationships which I outlined earlier within the context of the present programming style. I want to emphasize this point. There are plenty of things for everyone to do to improve and expand participation as we all move toward a generally better pattern of relationships.

On the procedural side, there appear to be three general approaches. The first is to permit and indeed to encourage universities to seek out on their own the complementarities appropriate to project requirements and to incorporate them into formal responses to AID

requests for proposals. Universities are in fact doing this on an increasingly frequent basis. However, the information available within the university community is incomplete, so that the existence of a particular source of expertise may be overlooked. Furthermore, this is a time-consuming activity for Title XII Officers and other university officials who may already be overburdened. It is easier to stay on familiar turf than to plow new ground with a university which is located in a different area of the country and may be a member of a different regional grouping. One rarely sees, for example, proposals which combine universities from the arid states with those in the humid sub-tropics or the southeast. I have the impression that those which do get formed are based more on personal contact than institution-to-institution relationships. Despite its limitations, this "leave it to the universities" approach does have some potential for expansion of the role of smaller universities. However, for this potential to be realized, there needs to be more active communication within the university and consortium community, from large to small, East to West, 1890 to 1862, NASULGC to AASCU and vice versa. Further, BIFAD would welcome Documentation of Interest forms from universities with excellent resources for components of a project, even though they may not have all of the capacity required. Such information can be matched with other interests and information available. BIFAD's effectiveness is constrained at present by the fact that we seldom receive a Documentation of Interest from project components. Another constraint is that the standard rules

for contract competition tend to create a pattern in which the fortunes of partner universities are tied to the success or failure of the principal proposing institution. An excellent small institution may lose out if its partner is deficient in some respect.

A second general approach would be to modify present competitive practice to permit AID to consider proposals for project components and to give project committees the flexibility to craft, from component proposals which fall within a competitive range, the optimum combination of resources. As in any tailoring operation, a bit of post-proposal cutting and trimming might be necessary to paste together the perfect fit. It is my understanding that the present practice rejects as non-responsive a proposal for a component of a project, even though that proposal may represent the best available resource for the job to be done. As I understand present practice, the only way that these resources can be ensured of utilization is that they be made a formal part of each and every full proposal. These constraints appear to flow from the contracting practices of AID, which are based on regulations applicable prior to the passage of the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1978.

A third approach would be to adopt the Cooperative Agreement as the preferred instrument for mobilizing university resources to assist in planning and implementation of AID-financed agricultural programs. There is a substantial body of opinion within the Agency that supports this position. The Cooperative Agreement as an assistance instrument

has many advantages. Among these, the one which seems most relevant to the purpose of this conference is that there appears to be more flexibility in the rules with respect to competitive procedures. The Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act does indeed require that competition for such agreements be maximized. However, in comparison to the rules for competitive contracting, there would be significantly more flexibility available to project committees for putting together optimal resource packages. In particular, proposals for components of a project would be much more manageable in this system than in a contract competition. In this environment, the probability of AID engaging well-qualified personnel and other resources from smaller and less-experienced universities would be significantly higher than in the present winner-takes-all system. To fulfill its potential, however, this approach means that the university community must be willing to operate in a format in which they frequently do not have sole control over their resources but, rather, engage them in a partnership style. For the good of the program, universities may therefore need to forego whatever political visibility or other less tangible satisfactions may be perceived as benefits to the leaders of a principal contracting entity. Conversely, so-called lead universities must be receptive and creative in developing a collaborative framework that not only utilizes the resources of its contributing partner universities, but also ensures that they benefit, prorata, in terms of staff development and the other intangible and tangible rewards of successful participation in agricultural development.

The cooperative agreement approach would encourage and require more realistic self-assessment on the part of all universities and a greater willingness to cooperate with other, sometimes unfamiliar, institutions.

While I have some evident biases, I do recognize that each of the approaches just outlined has validity depending on the circumstances of each program. None will ever be used exclusively. What we should all strive for is an overall set of programming techniques and procedures from which can be selected the combination of universities which will produce the best program in each respective developing country. The benefits to us will be better relationships between AID and the universities, and significant enrichment of the international dimension of education and research programs on many campuses, large and small.