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COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: RUINED HOPES AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS IN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

International development assistance to Sahelian countries increased by 80 percent between 1974 and 1979 (U.S. Agency for International Development, 1978:6). The United States bilateral contribution to this effort rose by 3,200 percent during the same period. Soon after the assistance process began, critics declared the many programs and projects to be ineffective. For example, Franke and Chasin (1980: 163-64), after spending four months of 1978 in Senegal, Mali and Niger, concluded that most projects had failed because of biases imposed by Western government multinational interests and by the interests of Sahelian elites.

Such sweeping assessments may be valid, but in some cases the judgments may have been premature. In 1978, most operating projects sponsored by the U.S. were less than two years old; they were still in their infancy and did not warrant definitive evaluations of success or failure. In addition, any assessment would have required a clear definition of project objectives with which to evaluate performance. Yet, development assistance projects, particularly young ones, are rarely well understood--by sponsors, participants, or beneficiaries (Byrnes, 1964: 196). Critics need exceptional insight to judge such ambiguous undertakings.

More important perhaps, the fortunes of development assistance projects are not independent of the characteristics of the individuals directly and indirectly involved in them or of the changing relations between these individuals. Analyses that examine only factors exogenous to the people most intimately involved may yield misplaced conclusions about the causes of assessed performance, be it success or failure.

Attention to the human factor in project work is particularly important in the case of U.S. bilateral efforts in the Sahel. The increase in development

assistance from $3 million to $97 million during the five year period did not constitute a drain on U.S. financial resources. It did, however, place a heavy burden on the human resource available to implement the assistance. U.S. involvement in Francophone Africa prior to 1974 was limited. There were few experienced technicians and administrators fluent in French available for work on development programs, and their number could not quickly increase by 3,200 percent. Many of the people engaged in the Sahel programs were not prepared for the technical and administrative challenges they would face. In implicitly or explicitly condemning the work of such individuals, critics may have used idealized performance criteria instead of criteria more appropriate to the characteristics of the resources actually available for projects.

This paper provides a description of human interaction, ambiguity, and learning that took place during the course of two "Urban Functions in Rural Development" (UFRD) projects which the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) conducted in Upper Volta and northern Cameroon between 1977 and 1982. Starting with the former, the description contains an overview of the project's origins, the factors that shaped its design, the difficulties that participants encountered during initiation and execution, the process of evaluation, and the eventual impact of the undertaking. It then traces a similar sequence for Cameroon, with particular attention on AID's efforts to follow through and transfer to this project the lessons learned from the experience in Upper Volta.[1]

After noting that such projects can be very difficult and complex, I conclude by arguing that the difficulties and complexities are not problems: they are simply facts. The problem is that of expanding the corps of seasoned Americans who can master the facts. In this context, development projects have

an implicit, near-term purpose of education in the arts of seeing and overcoming the difficulties. A measure of success or failure should, therefore, be the degree to which learning contributes to improved performance. From a moral standpoint foreign aid programs should not be used as tuition for Americans. But as a near-term practical matter they must be used in this way if the U.S. is to match its material resources with human resources capable of making a difference in development assistance.

ORIGINS

The Office of Urban Development was established by AID in 1970 to help its field missions generate new ideas for assistance in urban area. Amendments to the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act in 1973 required that AID give priority to agricultural and rural development, and the Office commissioned several studies to examine methods by which its urban development activities could be better integrated with this new emphasis. One of these studies (Rondinelli and Ruddle, 1976), drawing on the geography literature, suggested that AID assistance programs overlooked the importance of urban hierarchies (e.g., regional centers, market towns, service centers, etc.) in rural areas. The study argued that programs for strengthening facilities and economic services in these centers could promote development of their hinterlands.

Office staff believed that this approach was promising and worthy of trial implementation through several planning projects. If successful, the projects would establish the practical utility of spatial analysis for rural development. To translate what was then no more than an idea into a concrete undertaking, the Office sent copies of the study to several AID missions.

The Upper Volta Mission received a copy in 1976. While staff members could not judge the merits of the technical methods described in the report,

they were intrigued by the promise that a UFRD study would identify investment programs. Like other AID stations in West Africa at that time, the Mission had difficulty in identifying projects through which to disburse development assistance funds authorized by Congress. When mission staff proposed a UFRD study to the Ministry of Rural Development, the latter responded positively. While ministry staff members also had only a vague understanding of spatial analysis, they were quite interested in an undertaking that promised to identify development investments and which, at the same time, might improve staff planning capabilities.[2]

The Office, the Mission, and the Ministry agreed that a project would be worthwhile, and that the basic goal of the undertaking, directly or indirectly, would be to promote rural development. As is normal in practice, the project would also respond to several other agendas, although inconsistencies between some of them would later become sources of difficulty. The multiplicity of agendas, however, constituted the basis for initial agreement; there might have been no project without them.

DESIGN

In March, 1977, the Office sent two of its staff members to Upper Volta, for prior experience had demonstrated that design pursued in ignorance of local conditions was unwise. The team began by appraising the functions and capabilities of the Ministry. One important problem was that the Ministry's mandate was to plan and execute agricultural programs. Outside of this sector its duties were limited to coordination at the local level with staff or other agencies responsible for health, education, administration, public works, etc. The Ministry had little responsibility for the types of activities and interventions which the Office associated with "urban functions."

This disadvantage seemed less important after the team assessed alternative institutions. Other agencies had fewer technical and administrative personnel stationed in rural areas, shorter histories of interaction with rural communities, and hence less ability to translate plans into feasible actions. An additional advantage was that the Ministry had worked with AID for several years. The UFRD could thus integrate itself into an established system of cooperation. While not ideal, the Ministry seemed to be the best institution available. Nevertheless, to overcome the constraint imposed by the Ministry's limited mandate, the design included an explicit component that required ongoing communication and collaboration between project staff, other government units, and donor agencies.

The designers then turned to the selection of a geographic area. Spatial theory required that the project be applied to a region with urban centers and economic development potential. Available data suggested three areas: Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, and Koudougou. The Mission objected to all of these because AID had committed its assistance program to the Fada region. To take eventual advantage of investment programs proposed by UFRD, the Mission required implementation in that region. The government, which was responsible for the whole country, did not care where the Mission chose to execute the project. Regions appropriate for Office purposes were thus inappropriate for the Mission, and vice-versa. They therefore agreed on two regions: Koudougou and Fada.[4]

With respect to technical composition of the project, office staff understood that the translation of theory into practical analysis was a complex matter. They recognized their own limited knowledge of the regions and did not want to specify techniques and tasks precisely, preferring instead to leave

these open for later development and adaptation by a yet to be recruited project team. The Ministry and Mission, unfamiliar with the theory involved, demanded tangible design elements that would establish a clear basis for a contractual agreement between their respective countries. Office staff therefore established a list of "illustrative" tasks and techniques borrowed from an earlier UFRD project in the Philippines.

The design was vague regarding project supervision. The Office would monitor technical progress from Washington, and the Mission would handle local administrative matters as necessary. The "two-headed" framework was unavoidable because mission staff members were not qualified to assess techniques and office staff members could not administer from such a great distance. Supervision was, in any case, not a priority consideration. In practice, AID tended to pass responsibility for implementation directly to project managers, thus permitting them greater freedom to adapt to changing circumstances. However, to assure some degree of guidance to the project, office staff insisted that a mid-term evaluation be integrated into the design. This would permit a period of reflection upon prior progress and upon proposed project directions. If necessary, the team could redesign the project so that lessons learned along the way would inform similar projects later.

With basic issues taken care of, office personnel returned to Washington in April, 1977, while the mission staff worked out organizational details of a project grant agreement with the Upper Volta government. The agreement, signed in August, 1977, called for AID to provide technical assistance to the Ministry's Agricultural Planning Cell in the capital and, through the Cell, to ministry staff in the two regions. Assistance would be provided by a U.S. contractor who would fill the position of deputy director of the project for two years. The contractor would work under a ranking ministry administrator,

designated as project director, and with two local planners. With a budget of $350,000, the team was to meet four general objectives: (1) to carry out urban functions studies; (2) to develop a plan for strengthening the contributions of urban centers to rural development; (3) to develop a list of investment priorities for facilities and services; and (4) to increase the capacities of the Ministry in planning methods and processes. The parties to the agreement anticipated that it would take between four and six months to recruit a contractor, to find local staff, and to obtain necessary office space, equipment, and vehicles. They therefore set the project completion date for March, 1980, expecting it to begin in January or February, 1978.

INITIATION AND EXECUTION

By March, 1978, the Ministry had fulfilled its responsibilities to the agreement. Office space, equipment, and staff were in place, but the Office's efforts to recruit a U.S. contractor--begun in November, 1977--encountered interminable delays.[5] In response to increasing government impatience, the Office decided to begin the project in June using short-term assistance as a stop-gap measure until a contractor arrived.

The first visit by office representatives took place in July. In this one-week period they worked with the team to clarify project objectives, to discuss modifications to the "illustrative" tasks contained in the agreement, to identify activities that could be started immediately, and to resolve minor administrative matters with the Mission. As an act of protocol, and also to set in motion essential communication and cooperation, the visitors and team members travelled to the regions to discuss the project with public officials stationed there. They found the officials dissatisfied with having been excluded from project design discussions. Their prime concern was that the

project would result only in an abstract study--and there had been enough of these already. Office staff assured them that the project would identify concrete programs, and that the programs would be documented in a manner suitable for submission to donor agencies.

A second visit, in August, was made by two consultants: a spatial analyst and an anthropologist. Both of them focused on carrying out several of the technical tasks in the agreement and on preparing a workplan for the local team to pursue after their departure. The anthropologist prepared a separate report for AID in which he argued that rural development in Upper Volta would be forever compromised by centralization of power and resource allocation and by "top-down" approaches to planning. He recommended adoption of a "grassroots" strategy and of efforts to create meaningful local administration capabilities built on indigenous management resources. The report inferred that a purely technical approach, like the methods listed in the agreement, was inappropriate for the purposes of development.

After the consultants' departure in September, the team tried to complete the workplan's tasks. It accomplished little during the next seven months, because the project director gave almost no time to the project and because the two junior team members simply did not know what to do. The consultants had spent most of their time executing the agreement's tasks. They did not try to train team counterparts in the process. They left "how-to" memoranda behind, but did not consider whether or not the team would understand their instructions.

The U.S. contractor finally arrived in March, 1979, accompanied briefly by the spatial analyst who had visited in August and September. He seemed eminently qualified. Fluent in French, he had served for many years as a senior administrator in neighboring Ghana during the colonial period and had

visited what is now Upper Volta periodically since 1948. He was, moreover, the type of administrator who felt most comfortable chatting with villagers and local officials, designing programs around what they deemed important, and assisting them to implement and manage such programs on their own. His only apparent weakness was that he did not have prior exposure to spatial analysis, but this seemed minor compared to what he did have to offer. In any case, the project director and at least one other team member seemed to have the necessary background to offset the contractor's technical limitations.

Soon after taking charge of the project, the contractor wrote to the Office and questioned the need for further investigating "urban functions" through the methods listed in the project agreement. Every town and village in the region needed something. He felt that geographic analysis could not yield useful ideas. Analysis of development factors, such as the existence of dynamic community leadership, seemed potentially more useful. The Office responded to the contractor in May and, after reminding him that the UFRD design was flexible, encouraged him to adapt methods to local conditions and to innovate and improvise as necessary.

In June, the contractor suggested that "urban functions" could be more aptly described as "local government functions" and that the project might usefully orient itself toward programs for improving public services (e.g., schools, dispensaries, and maternity clinics), perhaps through introduction of local taxation or other forms of revenue generation. He was, in effect, proposing a shift in the project from spatial analysis to local administration. This reflected his own interests and experience and was consistent with the anthropologist's conclusions ten months earlier.

In response, the Office reiterated its encouragement of innovation and adaptation, but expressed concern that local government and taxation issues

should not overshadow the basic spatial analysis purposes of the project. The contractor replied in July that, although he was personally interested in administration, he would not make the mistake of confusing it with the objectives of UFRD.

Still, as he indicated some months later during evaluation discussions, the contractor and other team members did not feel that there was justification for studies of spatial organization in a country with so much evident need. This belief was reinforced each day as the team carried out its survey of the inhabitants. Respondents had expectations. They gave gifts of chickens and goats to team members to "grease the wheels," and they eventually received whiskey, soap, or salt in return. But that was not what they wanted. They wanted schools, teachers books, dispensaries, medicine, and wells. To the project team, UFRD seemed very irrelevant.

Between July and September, the team embarked on an approach which they thought could integrate a locally-responsive agenda with that of UFRD. They surveyed 1,300 localities in both regions, identified 44 villages as "urban centers" in the regions, and carried out detailed "urban functions" studies for each center. The studies focused almost exclusively upon the equipment and supplies required by schools, dispensaries, and maternity clinics, the repairs and construction needed by these facilities, and the characteristics of the people responsible for them. The team counted the number of desks that needed fixing, the number of quinine tablets required by dispensaries, etc. It was a monumental undertaking.

They used some of the data to prepare scalograms, hierarchy classifications of centers, and other methodological items required by the project agreement. These tasks were of secondary importance. The team used the information primarily to prepare a list of priority expenditures for new construction,

repairs, equipment, and supplies needed by existing public services in the 44 centers. They had decided that these were the kinds of investments which the project would identify and that they were the ones demanded by the agreement.

During the earlier part of this work period, contact between the contractor and the mission staff was infrequent but, nonetheless, cordial. The former attempted to keep the latter abreast of progress, and the latter assisted the former with minor administrative matters as they arose. The staff was not, however, the same as had participated in UFRD's design. These were new people who were not interested in the technical aspects of the project. One reason was that they did not understand how the team's activity--in the Mission's view a needs assessment exercise--corresponded to the spatial analysis intent of the agreement. Rather than raise the question, they preferred to assume that this was a matter best left to the team and the Office. A second reason was that, by 1979, the Mission's demand for projects had ebbed. The current staff had inherited a large array of small projects from previous mission administrations. They were having difficulty keeping track of them, and had little interest in hearing proposals for more. A third reason was that the conduct of a few Voltaic project managers had drifted beyond the bounds of what AID considered acceptable, and mission staff members were preoccupied with trying to solve these problems.

In June, relations between the project and the Mission began to deteriorate. The director, who by this time had ceased to be involved in UFRD's day to day activities, was involved in an accident in which a vehicle was destroyed and purchased another using project funds without prior consent of AID.[6] To make matters worse, the mission staff discovered that he had used his leverage to borrow money from project personnel to pay personal debts and that he had put a friend on the project payroll as a "mobile secretary." The Mission

briefly cut off project funds in July to signal its displeasure and demanded corrective action from the Ministry.

The contractor regarded this situation as part of the normal pattern of administrative practice in Africa--certainly no different from what prior experience had taught him to expect. He believed that, with due care, deliberation, and patience, he could arrange an acceptable solution. What he did not realize was that AID had become upset with the Ministry as a whole because of similar problems elsewhere; the Mission had nearly exhausted its reserve of care, deliberation, and patience. Since the matter appeared to be one that should be resolved between AID and the government, and since the contractor was inexperienced in AID methods of diplomacy, he focused his attention on proceeding with the work. He did not inform the Office of what was happening because it did not present itself as an issue warranting attention in Washington by individuals who, in any case, were too far away to do anything about it.

With problems still unresolved in September, the Mission sent a cable to the Office urgently requesting a visit to discuss "serious difficulties." The cable did not, however, indicate the nature of the difficulties. Since the Office had already scheduled a mid-term evaluation visit, staff members arrived in October expecting to carry out the evaluation. But they could not do it because their time was used to prevent the Mission from terminating the project. They did save the project: by helping the Mission to clear up the problems, by arranging for the appointment of a new director, and settling outstanding debts incurred by the previous one. They argued that the contractor was doing outstanding work, that the project was fulfilling the Office's conceptual and technical expectations, and that it was well on the way to identifying useful investment programs for urban-rural development.[7]

By this time, the primary aim of the team had become that of designing a small rural works program. It was proposed that AID use $100,000 in project funds, which had not been spent because of the initial delay in contractor recruitment, to implement the program in March, 1980.[8] The program would assist village groups to finance the "urban functions" that they deemed essential, but it would be necessary for the villages to establish mechanisms for maintaining facilities and services that had been put in place. The contractor sent an outline of the proposal to the Office in December. He received a reply in late January, 1980, which recommended that he not be reoccupied with the program because other tasks in the project agreement were becoming more important, and progress on some of them was too slow.

At that time, the team believed that AID would extend the project for a year beyond its official completion date of March, 1980, to compensate for the initial delay in hiring the contractor. It had not communicated extensively with personnel of other government and donor agencies because it assumed that this would be done after it had outlined a program that could serve as a framework for discussions. Team members were therefore isolated from and ignorant o other assistance projects, organizations, and personnel.

Project participants also believed that what they were doing was correct, at least until the receipt of the January letter from the Office. Although they had spent almost no time with office staff members during the October mid-term evaluation--because the latter were preoccupied with saving the project at the Mission, their work had been referred to as "outstanding." What they and the Office did not know, perhaps what they could not know, was the extent of Mission dissatisfaction with the project and its desire to end it quickly.[9]

EVALUATION

AID asked me to carry out a final evaluation in February, 1980. I subsequently embarked upon a series of discussions about the project with as many of the people who were (directly or indirectly) involved with it as time would permit. The contractor and the team's two rural planners were satisfied with what they had accomplished and were looking forward to completing the work they had assigned themselves. I suggested that there appeared to be an inconsistency between team activities and the content of the project agreement. They responded that spatial analysis methods, while possibly useful elsewhere, are inappropriate in regions dedicated almost entirely to subsistence agriculture and in a country in which public resources are insufficient to maintain current facilities and services--let alone invest in new ones. The team also argued that Upper Volta was the subject of too many studies. Rural development required action; relevance demanded that the only sensible course, in such circumstances, would be to help village inhabitants to help themselves. Establishment of effective local government was in order, and the small rural works program that they had outlined in December, and which the team intended to develop into a proposal format over the coming weeks, would attempt to accomplish just that.

The project's new director--a geographer--disagreed. He felt that the work had strayed far from the original intent of the project. As he understood it, this was to be a trial study to see whether or not analytical methods of the UFRD type could assist in identifying programs in towns and villages to promote development in surrounding areas. He had not interfered with the conduct of the team's work because he had come to the project recently. He assumed that what the team was doing was, in fact, what the Ministry, the Office, and the Mission wanted done.

A member of the office staff who accompanied me agreed with the team and recalled that the project agreement contained only an "illustrative" list of tasks. He had encouraged the team to adapt these to local conditions. If the conditions demanded that the study orient itelf to local government, and if the orientation required introduction of needs assessment methods, then this was the correct way to proceed. He noted, however, that for evaluation purposes the Office had made a mistake in not changing key segments of the agreement to reflect these adaptations.

Mission personnel admitted that they did not understand the purpose of the project. They said they did not like it because of the administrative headaches it had caused. Nevertheless, as individuals experienced in rural development, they had considerable sympathy for what the team had said. They noted that AID had implemented many projects in developing countries with similar orientations. Indeed, the Mission was in the process of preparing two such projects for Upper Volta. As administrators, however, their prime interest in regard to evaluation was whether and to what degree the project had met the objectives stiuplated for it in the agreement. U.S. government policy requires that funds allocated for a certain purpose, however vaguely described, must be used to accomplish that purpose. A needs assessment study leading to a local government development program, while useful, was not part of the project agreement. Mission staff argued that it would be wrong to modify retroactively the objectives of a contract during a final evaluation. To do so would invite the charge that assistance projects can do whatever participants feel necessary and afterwards justify any project activities because of their "appropriateness." Notwithstanding the utility of devolution and adaptation (in principle), there are limits. The Office, the Ministry, and/or the team should have suggested official modifications much earlier.

When I conducted my evaluation work in the regions, I found village chiefs, schoolteachers, nurses, and midwives to be very enthusiastic about the project. They expected great things to happen as a result of it. Government and donor officials in the regions, and in the capital, had mixed reactions. The few who knew something about UFRD were, like the Mission, confused about the relationship between "urban functions" and the project's idea of local government: a subject like local administration was a matter for the Ministry of the Interior rather than for the Ministry of Rural Development. Most officials said that they could not judge the project because they knew little or nothing about it. They therefore were indifferent about whether the Mission should or should not extend it.

The only empirically verifiable fact that presented themselves related to disagreements about the project's purposes and about whether or not it had succeeded in meeting its objectives. Also, there was confusion about whether a "final" evaluation was warranted of a project that had been implemented for two years on paper and one year in fact. I had many questions and few answers. Had the contractor made a correct decision in moving the project in one of several possible directions appropriate to conditions in the two regions? Had the Office, recognizing its own initial ignorance of local circumstances, acted wisely in not being too insistent about the tasks specified in the project agreement and in encouraging the team to adapt methods as required? Given the framework of U.S. administrative practice, was the Mission acting with reason in insisting that the project be judged in terms of what the Office and Ministry had promised it would do? The answers were not self-evident.

I was pressed for time and judged the moment unwise for preparing a treatise on the metaphysical premises of implementation and evaluation. I decided that the specific tasks set down in the agreement were less important than the

project's four general objectives and that it should, therefore, be assessed against those objectives.[10] I then argued that a proper evaluation could not take place without an extension for another year; for the design had assumed that two years of actual technical assistance were necessary to achieve those objectives. Office and ministry staff members and the team naturally agreed with my position. The mission staff did not. One of my arguments was that the team had not yet produced reports from its massive survey work, providing little material to evaluate. The Mission thus agreed to an extension through June, 1980, with the understanding that it would extend the project further only if technical progress showed promise at that time.

The contractor left in March, with his first year completed and the second uncertain. During the next three months, the rest of the team tried to put together a report. Their task was impossible. For the preceding year they had not received the kind of technical assistance AID had promised, and now they were asked to produce a report containing methods that they had not learned, types of data they had not collected, and program investments they had never thought about. The document they presented in May appeared not to justify the $250,000 already spent on the project.

Government officers argued in June that responsibility for this outcome rested with AID because the latter had provided one year of assistance instead of two. Moreover, for that year AID had supplied the Ministry with a contractor whose background and qualifications were largely incompatible with the technical demands of the project design. The Ministry therefore requested that AID extend the project and thus fulfill its obligations. The Office agreed. Mission staff responded to the Ministry by arguing, in effect, that the administrative difficulties of 1979 constituted a breach of the project agreement by

the government. As a result, AID was no longer obligated to respect its terms.

The Mission replied to the Office that an extension would be impossible. It had no staff available to monitor project administration or to supervise technical aspects. Experience had shown that the Office might require twelve to eighteen months to recruit a new contractor, assuming that it could eventually find a suitable candidate and that short-term assistance of the kind provided in 1978 was not effective. In any case, researchers from Michigan State University (MSU), on contract to AID, were already in the process of undertaking an urban functions study in the Fada region. The Office would be able to draw conclusions about UFRD from that study. There was no reason for AID to implement redundant projects. The Mission rejected the request for an extension.

I then returned to the U.S. and prepared the evaluation report (PCI, 1980). Preceded by a disclaimer about the utility of a "final" assessment of a half-project, the report contained a list of "shoulds" and "oughts" that mirrored the content of typical AID evaluation documents.[11] The Office forwarded the material to the Mission and the Ministry in August. The report pleased no one. a description of how not to design and implement a project did not explain the use of $250,000 in foreign aid intended somehow to assist the rural poor.

IMPACT

Dissatisfied with this outcome, the Office proposed to the Mission and Ministry in October that the project director and I prepare a final technical report to demonstrate that the project had indeed generated useful information. They agreed. The work would take place in Washington.

Analyses undertaken by the team were inadequate. Fortunately, researchers from MSU had by this time returned to the U.S. They shared with us their data on the Fada region, as did the World Bank with data gathered by its consultants in the Koudougou region in 1979. The report (PCI, 1981) was completed in May. It was, to a great extent, a summary and reinterpretation of borrowed material. Nevertheless, it contained many maps, diagrams, tables, and sector descriptions that generally resembled those which the UFRD project was originally supposed to produce. The report also featured the recommendation of the small works program prepared by the project team.

The Ministry and Mission received copies in July, 1981. For a time the report became a general reference for information about the two regions because MSU and World Bank reports were not readily available. As a result, the Ministry and Mission were pleased that they had a tangible product in hand that was proving useful. The Office was pleased that the project was ending on a more positive note than was the case earlier.

In September, the Mission passed the report to a local administration development project from Syracuse University. The purpose of this project was to explore possibilities for establishing the types of community self-help processes that had preoccupied UFRD team members. While in the country onother business in October--and at the request of AID and the University, the UFRD project director and I spent several days going over the report and the evaluation with the administration project's staff. The information in the reports and our discussions provided useful points of reference for them. Even though indirect, the UFRD project did have a small positive impact in Upper Volta.

FOLLOW-THROUGH

In mid-1980, Office staff decided to transfer as may of the lessons learned from the evaluation of Upper Volta to a similar effort about to begin in Cameroon.[12] The staff did not want the same, ambiguous results. The first attempt at transferring lessons took place in July, 1980. By then I had completed the evaluation of UFRD and the Office had recruited a project director for Cameroon--the spatial analyst who had served as short-term consultant in Upper Volta in 1978 and 1979. At the Office's request, we discussed the evaluation and tried to explore how its conclusions and recommendations might assist the upcoming work. The first attempt was not successful. The director was a man with technical interests and several years of overseas experience as a planning technician rather than as an administrator. To him, discussions in Washington about a project in Upper Volta with imagined implications for Cameroon seemed somewhat absurd. Without the experience of having participated in project failure, he could not use the evaluation in a manner that would have relevance for his forthcoming activities. This may have been a manifestation of the worn dictum that individuals rarely learn from the mistakes of others. More often, they learn from their own errors; and the director had not yet made any.

Other matters were more important. The director's wife was about to give birth to their first child, he was anxious to start earning a salary, and the project that would provide his income was running into initiation delays.[13] In any event, upon receipt of a cable from the Mission that all was prepared and that the project could start, the director joined his team--an American economist and a Cameroonian sociologist--in Yaounde in September. Upon their arrival, they were surprised to learn that no one in the Mission knew that they

were coming or why they were there at all. The one individual who did, the person who had sent the cable, was on home leave.

After several days of rummaging through files, a mission staff member found correspondence about the project. The Mission then transferred responsibility for UFRD from the section that had negotiated the agreement with the government to another which knew nothing about it. At this time there was also a new mission director; neither he nor the staff of the newly-designated section understood the relevance of UFRD for AID's rural development strategy. The Mission's earlier concern with urban development, an interest that had brought UFRD to the country in the first place, dissipated with the departure of the previous director. The Mission therefore asked the team to revise the project design. In October, after three revisions, the director was still not satisfied. He nevertheless decided to grant the team the benefit of doubt, but he insisted that they identify fundable programs in the project's final output.

During the same period, the team met with their counterparts in the Ministry of Housing's Regional Planning Department. The Department's staff, well-versed in spatial analysis, consisted of only two people. The team would have to work with officials of other agencies stationed in the project area in the northern (Sahelian) part of the country. The team members would act as the Department's representatives there. The Department had a mandate to establish regional offices, but the resources required to do so were not available. UFRD would thus serve the purpose of required decentralization.

Mission, department, and project staff also renegotiated the geographic boundaries of the project. The original design covered an area surrounding two major urban center, Maroua and Garoua--an appropriate region for a UFRD study. The provincial governor requested that AID explore the possibility of improving

a road to his village. In response, the Mission decided that UFRD should do double-duty, and it modified the project region to cover only the districts adjacent to the road.[14] This new region excluded the major centers. It included only small villages and surrounding areas with little development potential.

With the change in emphasis from urban to rural development, and with the shift of project responsibility from one section to another within the Mission, AID lost the original rationale for having the study take place. As before, the UFRD team was forced to apply methods of analysis which were inappropriate for the subject and region. The Office protested, but the Mission remained steadfast.

The director of the Upper Volta project and I joined the team in December as short-term consultants. This was the second attempt to transfer lessons. We began by addressing the team members' frustration about what happened in September and October. We tried to convince them that confusion is a perfectly normal characteristic of AID missions which are recurrently subject to changes in personnel and personalities and that such bureaucratic turmoil is likely to repeat itself from time to time. We stressed that communication and cultivation of good working relationships with government and donor agency personnel in the region and in Yaounde would not only help the project technically, it would also provide a politically sound base from which to deal with the Mission. And we argued that the team should make every effort to be attuned to the dynamics of mission operations and to inform the Mission of project progress. We delivered a short series of lectures about how to treat as normal events that each of the team member's limited experiences clearly classified as abnormal, but this did not have the effect we hoped for.

We fared better on technical issues. First, we deliberated on the strengths and weaknesses of each team member and identified the types of expert consultants that would be required over the life of the project. The need for a better qualified economist, for example, became evident. Next, we drew up guidelines to assist the director in modifying the original design to suit regional characteristics and to yield the projects that the Mission wanted. We then suggested a roundabout way in which the major urban centers could be reintegrated into the project without changing the regional boundaries agreed upon in October.

I returned in August, 1981, accompanied this time by the Office's original project designer. In the intervening seven months, the team had made rapid progress in completing its spatial analysis and needs assessment tasks (which, this time, was an explicit component of the design). UFRD methods were, nevertheless, again proving useless in identifying investment programs. Mission and department personnel, as well as officials of other agencies in the region, were anxious about the team's inability to make progress in this regard. We therefore revised the project agreement: we added sectoral analyses that could more readily identify and justify investment programs, and we rescheduled task execution to adjust for project initiation delays and the new workplan. Mission and department staff agreed to these adjustments and attached them as official amendments to the agreement. This was a direct transfer of a key lesson from Upper Volta.

The transfer was possible because team members were beginning to sense that they were having troubles, both technical and administrative. It was also possible because the theoretical benefits of devolving implementation responsibility to the team were turning into costs because team members were inexperi-

The problem was that the project had made little progress since August. Consultants hired to assist the project in sectoral analyses delivered mediocre reports. The project director had been swamped with unwanted administrative duties and could not attend to his own technical responsibilities. Although the sociologist had completed the enterprise surveys in a satisfactory manner, the economist was unable to analyze the data. The Office had not been able to find a consultant to assist him.

Much work remained to be done, but timing was critical. A conference was scheduled for March, 1982, at which participants from government and donor agencies would review a UFRD preliminary final report and discuss its findings. With the long lead times required for report preparation, analytical work had to be concluded by the end of the month.

Under these constraints, the director asked me to stop providing advice and to start doing some work. This turned another lesson from Upper Volta upside-down. Nevertheless, I devoted my attention to the tasks which should have been done by the economist--compressing 18 person-months of effort into ten days. I also sent a cable to the Office requesting that it find two consultants to complete the work I would leave behind. Upon my return to the U.S., I telephoned the Office and again urged action with respect to the consultants--stating verbally what I could not write in a cable that would have been reviewed by the Mission--that the project was in deep technical, administrative, and political trouble and urgently needed help. The Office responded with record speed. It recruited two consultants in January and dispatched them to Cameroon in February, in time for their work to be incorporated into the March conference proceedings.

Mission and department staff members evaluated the project in May, 1982. Their summary report began by describing it as a classic example of a project

beset by implementation problems. Among these, they listed inexperience and technical underqualification of the team, poor communication, inconsistency of AID and departmental guidance, and methodological confusion. At first glance, these difficulties suggested that UFRD in Cameroon had not benefitted from the experience in Upper Volta. Despite this, the evaluators concluded that the project had in fact achieved its objective of preparing a regional plan of identifying programs for facilities, services, and small-scale enterprises. The project was a (qualified) success!

Did this final judgment have anything to do with my efforts to carry out the Office's decision in 1980 to put new-found knowledge into practice? According to the evaluation report, the director believed that it had. Others felt that my efforts had only served to add confusion to the project. The question did not have an unequivocal answer.

I heard no more about UFRD until April, 1983, when I received a visit from members of Clark University's Department of Economic Geography. They were under contract with AID to assess all four projects (i.e., the two in Africa plus one each in the Philippines and Bolivia), to redesign future studies on the basis of the assessment, and to recruit individuals to implement the studies. By this time they had concluded, and had also convinced AID, that the technical premises of UFRD were false. The relationship between pure spatial analysis and identification of investment programs was marginal at best. In future work they would adopt a multidisciplinary/multiprofessional approach to development. This was good news. Seven years and $1.5 milliion (for the four projects) were more than enough to pay to discover what other donor agencies, such as the World Bank and UNDP, had been doing for a long time under the name of regional development planning.

The visitors asked if I would be interested in managing their projects in Upper Volta or Cameroon. I said no. They then asked if I knew of experienced people who might be. I supplied some names, but I doubted that the individuals in question would volunteer. I believed that Clark University would have difficulty in locating ideal candidates. The supply of assistance ideas still exceeds the supply of individuals able to put the idea to work. Nevertheless, I am confident that Clark will find eager recruits similar to those found for UFRD. I also am confident that the projects will run into troubles similar to those encountered by the previous ones and that the recruits will be tested to their limits. However frustrating the experience may again prove to be, performance in the future will improve upon the past. I believe that more Americans will come to know the facts of development assistance in the Sahel.

CONCLUSION

A Peace Corps volunteer recently asked me about the kind of problems she might face as a development assistant in Nepal. I took her assignment description and circled warning phrases about sources of "frustration." These included lack of cooperation and motivation from local people, funds not arriving on time, misunderstandings arising from inadequate information and poor communications, lack of support from supervisors or government counterpart agencies, and unexpected changes in work schedules and supervisors. I double-circled a sentence that noted that living and working in the country required adaptability, resourcefulness, and tolerance. Phrases and sentences not being enough, I searched my library for a paragraph. I paraphrased Tolstoy's (1942: 921-22) observation that individuals charged with executing a task are often at the center of a complex play of intrigues, of cares, of dependence and of power, of projects, counsels, threats and conceptions, with one thing depending

on another, and are under continual necessity of answering an immense number of mutually contradictory inquiries addressed to them. I even gave her an earlier draft of this paper to read.

On my first visit to Cameroon, I did not succeed in guiding the project team toward equanimity in the face of turbulence; nor did I succeed in training them in the fine arts of political action. The team had had four months of confused experience by that time. The Peace Corps volunteer had none--or so she believed. I therefore tried to focus her attention on the small abnormalities that she had experienced as a graduate student: incorrect grades on transcripts, misplaced financial-aid application forms, inconsistent direction from faculty advisors, incompetent teaching, forced consumption of surrealistic academic theory, wild gossip with the school, insensitive bureaucratic behavior, etc. I suggested that, notwithstanding these difficulties, she had still found school to be a rich and challenging experience and that the Peace Corps assignment description promised the same result. Upon leaving, she commented that she was unsure about what I was trying to tell her but that she was absolutely certain that she would discover what I meant--and then some--in Nepal.

Hirschman (1967), Tolstoy, and many others have implied that the circumstances of project work are not problems. They are simply facts which, depending on the characteristics of a particular individual, present themselves as having greater or lesser importance to the task at hand. The problem is that many people cannot see the facts of their situation and, as a result, are slow to master them.

In search of explanations for this blindness, Byrnes (1964) concluded that the assumptions and attitudes of Americans about how the world works are created by narrow educational foci and later reinforced by relatively sheltered working environments. Americans do not see that which they are not trained to

look for; subsequently, they find little incentive to ask questions about matters that, in the U.S., appear trite and/or self-evident.

If this analysis is correct, then much needs to be done to expand the scope of education in a direction that reduces naivete about the organizational circumstances of professional and civil conduct--in the U.S. and elsewhere. The fruits of such efforts, however, will be slow in coming. In the near term, learning to be competent can come more readily from the challenge and experience of trying to perform adequately in alien circumstances.

In this context, experiences such as UFRD can be understood as solutions rather than as problems. While the developmental challenges facing the people of Africa constitute the central issue to be addressed by U.S. assistance, the more immediate problem is that of creating a body of qualified Americans who can work with their local counterparts in meeting these challenges. As one analyst from the Third World has wisely put it, "...no matter what the language of diagnosis is, the problem (of development) is one of men and things and the solution to it also must be one of men and things" (Kurien, 1978: 2).

However a critic may, in retrospect, choose to judge the effectiveness of UFRD participants, the fact is that they tried to do their best. The Office recruited the best people it could find for the projects,, and it provided them with considerable freedom to adapt to local conditions. Although office staff members knew little about the circumstances of implementation in Africa at the beginning, they tried to integrate what was learned during the rough journey in Upper Volta into the work in Cameroon. In their turn, personnel in the two projects also learned and modified as they went along. At the same time, AID had recruited good people to staff its missions. They, too, had the discretion to respond to the unforeseen change, to employ insights gained from experience, and to take new forms of action--and they did so. In the process, all the

participants made errors of commission and omission, and some proved to be better at their work than others. Clear-cut success eluded both projects, but the important aspect was that even with relatively untested personnel, the work in Cameroon was a significant improvement over that in Upper Volta. Learning from experience may be slow and painful, but development assistance improves as long as learning does take place.

Berger (1974: 205) may be correct in arguing that, from a moral standpoint, it is not the purpose of Third World countries to solve the identify problems of Americans. It is also not the purpose of development assistance to serve as expensive tuition for continuing education about the vicissitudes of human existence. Berger recommends that the learning take place in Kansas. This is a good idea. Unfortunately, the idea is at odds with Byrnes' suggestion that the U.S. provides fewer incentives, to ask pertinent questions, and to seek answers than does Africa. Whatever the morality of the circumstance may be, in the near term, at least, many Americans must venture to Africa before they can be brought to understand what "...problems are and why they are often perplexing and not conclusively answerable in neat technical terms" (Stanley, 1978: 234).

NOTES

1. The description is based on my participation in the projects at various intervals during 1980-82. AID first requested that I evaluate the Upper Volta project in early 1980. For this purpose, I carried out archival research on all documents pertaining to the project available on file in Ouagadougou and Washington. These include contracts, correspondence, cables, hand-written notes and marginal comments, receipts, complete and incomplete reports, etc. I also undertook detailed discussions with almost all the people who directly or indirectly participated in the project. Later, AID asked that I provide technical assistance to the Cameroon project. This offered fewer possibilities for gathering information, but it did provide the opportunity for me to leave my comfortable position as an outside analyst and to become a project participant whose professional conduct would be as open to critical assessment by others as that of others was to me during the Upper Volta evaluation.

2. AID assistance practice at the time also included supplements to government salaries, full payment of salaries for additional local personnel attached to projects, and the purchase of vehicles to be transferred to the government upon project completion. This also served to heighten Ministerial willingness to cooperate.

3. For technicians at the Office, this was an opportunity to apply and to experiment with a set of techniques that looked promising in theory. For the Office as a whole, successful implementation would solidify a strong position within AID's overall assistance strategy. The Mission looked upon the project as a vehicle for short- and long-run increases in the flow of funds as well as an experiment in a novel approach to development. The Ministry viewed the project as a means to expand the resources available to it and as a means to continue to foster good relations with AID--the only donor agency providing it with significant support. Other agendas, both personal and institutional, were present as well.

4. The agreement contained an inherent contradiction. If Fada was truly inappropriate, then the project would not be able to identify the investment programs the Mission desired for the region. If the project identified programs for Koudougou, then the Office would have what it wanted but the Mission would still have nothing. Office staff members therefore argued that results from a study of the Koudougou region would prove helpful in developing an investment plan in Fada, although they did not indicate how this could be done. They also argued that because French assistance in the Koudougou region had stopped, AID might wish to consider expanding its program to fill the vacuum. The UFRD project, through its identification of potential investment programs, would assist the Mission in taking a decision on this matter. The Office did not know that at the time the World Bank was already financing a major study of potential investments in the region.

5. To begin the recruitment process, in November the Office submitted a copy of the project agreement to the Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (SDBU) Office. SDBU examined it to see if the contractor position should be set aside for tender by small or minority businesses. It decided that such action was inappropriate and cleared the project in January, 1978. The Office

then passed the agreement to AID's contracts section to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP). Because of personnel changes in the section, which caused the agreement to be handled by a number of different individuals, the RFP was not issued until May, 1978. Between May and August, the Office reviewed bids by several potential contractors. Few of the submissions seemed ideal. Qualified candidates put forward by consulting firms were too expensive. Individuals offering personal service contracts were not qualified. If they were fluent in French, they either had limited working experience or were not trained in spatial analysis. If they met either of these criteria, they were not fluent in language. The Office eventually selected three priority candidates and passed their submissions to General Council (GC), which had to assure that there would be no legal problems associated with a contract award. The process was held up in GC until January, 1979. The delay caused the prime candidate to withdraw his submission. The second candidate accepted the contract in February and proceeded to Ouagadougou the following month.

6. The contractor had gone on a short vacation at this time. With approval of the Mission, he left several blank checks with the director to cover project expenses during his absence. Had the accident occurred a week earlier or a week later, or had there been less money in the bank account, none of this would have mattered. The event was simply bad luck.

7. Since office staff members had no time to perform an evaluation, they made these arguments only on the basis of very brief discussions with the project team.

8. The Mission had requested that the ural works program be dropped in favor of completing the tasks set down in the project agreement during discussions with office staff in October, and the Office confirmed its concurrence in a letter to the Mission in November. Unfortunately, neither agency informed the contractor.

9. Office staff members thought they had resolved the administrative difficulties in October, and that the Mission would treat the issue as an unfortunate incident that was now past. In fact, the mission staff had to struggle with the Ministry for another month and a half before all matters were cleared up. The battle between the Mission and the Ministry had dragged on for over six months. The amount of funds at issue was small, about $8,000, but the effort to find a suitable solution had preoccupied two mission adminstrators on an almost full-time basis during the period. This effort seemed to the administrators to be well out of proportion to the size of the project, and with time they developed a significant dislike for it. Except for discussions with office staff in October, the Mission did not involve the team or the Office in its arguments with the Ministry. This was a diplomatic matter between representatives of the U.S. and the Upper Volta governments and was part of a larger series of diplomatic actions covering other assistance projects at the same time. The mission staff did not inform the Office of what was happening because, among other things, the Office could do nothing about it from Washington. The contractor knew but felt that AID's "overreaction" would pass. Besides, he had his contractual obligations to fulfill and he was not authorized to engage in issues far removed from them. In the circumstances, the Office and the team had little reason to suspect that the project was in political trouble.

10. This led to a heated debate with my colleague from the Office about the "true" objectives of the project. The debate did not last long because we soon realized that we were pretending to wrangle about the "final" outcome of a half-executed project. The immediate issue was politics, not the elusive principles of evaluation. The Office and Ministry "had" to say that the project was worth something at least. The Mission "had" to say that the something wasn't good enough. I "had" to say something reasonably intelligent because that was what AID and the U.S. taxpayer were paying me to do.

11. The report noted the need for greater care in expatriate and local staff recruitment, for more serious attention to training (especially by short-term consultants), for sensitivity to the limitations of technique--a reference to the inappropriateness of spatial analysis in certain types of areas, and to its inability to identify investment programs in general. With respect to managerial issues, the report reminded its readers of what they had already learned: to take as little as possible for granted. Projects, no matter how technical, are executed in a dynamic political environment. Attention to details such as timely and explicit project redesign and modification of contractual agreements is important. Constant nurturing of lines of communication is also important--if for no other reason than to keep abreast of potential difficulties that might indirectly affect implementation. Simply put, the evaluation recommended that participants do "better" in the future.

12. In April, 1979, the Cameroon mission invited office staff members to visit and assist the Mission in preparing a set of proposals aimed at development of secondary towns. The Mission asked the visitors to identify specific urban projects. The office staff members did not have time to respond to the request directly. They were in Cameroon for only a few days. They therefore suggested that the Mission undertake a study of the relationship between urban and rural development to yield appropriate projects and recommended a UFRD planning effort for this purpose. The Mission would have preferred a more concrete proposal, but it agreed to the study because of its apparent integration of urban and rural components into a single package. The design included the same spatial analysis component as in Upper Volta. It also included an explicit needs assessment study, for which the project would recruit a sociologist. An economist would also be hired to undertake a study of small-scale enterprises in towns and villages. This last component entered the design because the project designer, a labor economist, was in charge of the Office's programs of assistance to these types of enterprises. Also, from a theoretical point of view, these kinds of activities were sufficiently distinct from typical rural-agricultural activities that they would give substance to the notion of "urban functions." The project agreement contained a budget of $475,000, with substantial allowances for consultants to assist as necessary. It was signed in August, 1979.

13. Participants in the agreement made additional allowances for the time required to recruit contractors (three of them this time). They expected the project to start around April, 1980. The process was slow, and it encountered some confusion. While the Office searched in the U.S., the Mission looked in Cameroon. The Mission was first to find the sociologist--a Cameroonian recently graduated from the university--and hired him in June, 1980. This caused a protest from the Office because, after considerable difficulty, it had located and promised this position to a recent U.S. university graduate who had spent the summer of 1979 as an intern with the Mission. The Office eventually

resolved the conflict in July by shifting the American from the sociologist position to that of economist. The Office had hired the spatial analyst to act as project director in May. The director had some technical experience but no administrative experience. The other two had no professional experience to speak of. But these were the best people AID could find during the 10-month recruitment process. The project would therefore have to rely on its consultant budget to compensate for these weaknesses.

14. The Mission did not know that, one year earlier, the World Bank had decided to improve the road as part of a major regional development program which it would finance beginning in 1981.

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