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**A Review of
Colloquium Summary
"That Damn Foreign Aid"**

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Colloquium Summary

That Damn Foreign Aid

Report of The Winrock Colloquium on
Food, Hunger, and Agricultural Issues

OVERVIEW

This is a summary discussion of the Winrock meeting which addressed food production and hunger. The three main questions addressed were:

1. Can developing countries grow and equitably distribute food?
2. What should and could the international development community do to assist in food production and distribution?
3. What is an appropriate role for the U.S. to play?

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this colloquium was the fact that U.S. farmers and the news media were included in the proceedings. Both parties were given the opportunity to voice their opinions.

HIGHLIGHTS

Topic #1: The topic of whether or not the developing countries can grow while equitably distributing food was not discussed at length in the summary paper.

Topic #2: What can the international development community do to promote food production.

Issue #1: Is it possible to agree on the type of programs most acceptable?

Recommendation: Accelerated development which is agricultural in nature and growth which is employment-led is both desirable and feasible.

Issue #2: How can the international development community rally support from the public to provide funds?

Recommendation: Development stories in major publications are often complicated, unsupported by empirical evidence and filled with jargon. The story needs to be clear and concise so that outsiders can understand the basic needs of the developing countries.

Issue #3: How can the international development community find and convince new allies to support their causes?

Recommendation: The point needs to be made that everyone has a vested interest in natural resources, and natural resources do not pay attention to national boundaries. (The tie between natural resources and development is taken for granted here.)

·Topic #3: What is an appropriate U.S. role, and how can Congress and the public be convinced of the necessity of the role?

Issue #1: What type of aid should the U.S. focus on when giving aid in food production?

Recommendation: The U.S. has a comparative advantage in training and developing institutions such as natural research systems and universities.

Issue #2: How can Congress be convinced to fund such projects?

Recommendation: The U.S. farmers could prove a strong ally. If the development community would reach out to the farmers, coalitions in Washington D.C. could be very effective lobbies.

Issue #3: How can the public be convinced that foreign aid is necessary?

Recommendations: 1. Newspaper stories must point out that America will invest in security. It is simply a matter of whether that spending will be military in nature, or in the form of development assistance.

2. Newspaper stories must point out that it is the interest of the business community to develop these economies because they provide untapped markets for U.S. goods and services.

SUMMARY

"THAT DAMN FOREIGN AID"

An American government official tells about going home to the family farm and being engaged by his brother in a discussion of international development. The official explained the rationale for development assistance, carefully laying out the argument that the future of American agriculture depends on Third World markets. Finally the brother nodded in apparent agreement. "Well...yes," he said, pausing long enough for the official to believe his brother had been won, "but I just don't like that damn foreign aid."

Defending development can be a very touchy task. Communicating with the public -- especially with American farmers -- is not one of the development community's strong suits, yet the future of U.S. development efforts may hinge on public understanding and support.

In early 1988, Winrock hosted the first of 11 colloquia in an ambitious program sponsored by Michigan State University to examine U.S. involvement in international development. The goal of the program was to come up with specific recommendations for Congress and the new president on how to make development more effective.

Participants in each colloquium were to look at development through a different lense; one focused on the environment, another on population growth, another on science and technology, and so on. Winrock's "lense" was food production and hunger. The participants at this colloquium were asked to peer into the future and make informed guesses about whether Third World countries can grow and equitably distribute the food they need over the next decade, what the international development community should and could do to help in both production and distribution, and what role the United States should play in all of this.

In addition to development leaders, Winrock invited representatives of two groups outside the mainstream of the development world -- American farmers and the news media. Their participation was an acute, if initially uncomfortable, reminder to those in the mainstream that if they want public support they must nurture public understanding.

But even before the farm and media people began challenging other participants to think about how to communicate and convince, the first speaker on the agenda set the tone of the conference, illustrating the two most necessary elements of good communication: clarity and substance.

CLARITY AND SUBSTANCE

Don Paarlberg, professor emeritus at Purdue University, opened the colloquium with a story about how America's development efforts began in a president's apparent desire for rhetorical balance. "I need a fourth point," Harry Truman reportedly told his speechwriter as he reviewed an early draft of his inaugural address. And so, to Truman's call for creation of the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, and the North Atlantic Alliance was added "Point Four...a bold new program...to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens."

Reviewing 40 years of U.S. food aid and development assistance, Paarlberg concluded that despite periodic failures and a sometimes-unwieldy process, the program has been a success. The United States may have attempted to "address 100-year problems with 5-year plans, staffed with 2-year appointments, financed with annual appropriations," Paarlberg said, "but something must be working...because hunger is in retreat."

Paarlberg's challenge to the development community was to commit to a clear objective. If people are to commit themselves to the conquest of

hunger, they must catch the vision, he said. If the development community hopes to marshal human energy against hunger, it must clearly define its objectives and be able to articulate them.

A MEASURE OF AGREEMENT

In the next day and a half, 18 "heavyweights," leaders of international development and U.S. agriculture, took their turns at the podium. They talked about everything from primary health care to national security, from sustainable agriculture to food production and demand in the 1990s, from food aid to food trade.

In the discussions that followed each set of papers a measure of agreement was obvious on many issues. Most participants, for example, agreed that accelerated development in the less developed countries is both desirable and feasible, that the right kinds of development assistance are essential, and that the agricultural, employment-led growth is the best model for most of those countries.

They agreed that, though the development community has not taken full advantage of past experiences, it has learned some things from the last 40 years. One of those lessons is that each donor has unique strengths. The United States, for example, has demonstrated comparative advantages in training people and developing institutions such as national research systems and universities.

On the question of how to make assistance more effective, suggestions ran rampant: Make agriculture more sustainable; synchronize U.S. agricultural and food policy with foreign policy; get more continuity and less fadism in development; create mechanisms that would allow USAID to continue working in graduate countries; involve U.S. agricultural interests in the development dialogue; explore debt/equity swaps.

WHAT'S THE STORY HERE?

Mid-way through the colloquium, a panel discussion entitled "What's the story here?" gave the development people a rare opportunity to see their work through the eyes of the news media.

Most of the public gets its idea of development from the media. But from the development community's perspective, the media isn't doing a very good job of reporting on the subject. "Why is it," asked one participant, "that all we hear about are Third World debt problems? We don't hear about the fact that developing countries buy 40% of the goods and services the United States sells."

There are reasons development gets the kind of coverage it does, one of the media representatives said. Foremost is the competition for column inches and air time. For every story written there are 500 good ideas that no one has the time to follow up. The stories filed each week by Time Magazine reporters throughout the world could fill 10 textbooks, but there are fewer than 50 pages of news in every issue. There is simply more news than media space or time.

Because the competition is so keen, events or subjects that are timely and easy to grasp and explain are more likely to receive coverage. But too often development is neither. The message of development can be very complicated -- not only because of the lack of empirical evidence to link projects with results, but also because development has become mired in jargon. Development literature and conversation are so encrusted that they must be translated before they can be understood by outsiders, even well-educated outsiders.

The media -- like the public it serves -- wants communication that is concrete and understandable, the reporters and farm representatives said. If the development community wants public support it will have to make its story clear and the "outsiders" suggested the development community start by resolving the recommendations of this series of

colloquia into a one- or two-page statement of narrow, simply articulated goals and objectives.

WHY DO DEVELOPMENT?

In fact, much of the discussion before, as well as after, the media panel centered on the question of why the United States should do development at all.

The farmers and farm interests represented at the meeting helped keep the other participants reminded of two basic things the development community needs: clear goals and tough allies.

There was consensus that the goals must be sensible, based on both the real needs of developing countries and on what the United States can do best with the resources available. "We need do-able, attainable goals," said one participant, "and if they're going to be attainable, they've got to be not just humanistically but bureaucratically attainable."

Throughout the meeting, four kinds of goals were consistently named as essential.

First, humanitarian. People shouldn't go to bed hungry, the argument ran, and nations shouldn't be wasted by poverty.

Second, sheer survival of spaceship earth. The argument was that every passenger has a vested interest in how the ship runs. The effects of environmental degradation and abuse of natural resources don't stop at national borders.

Third, national interest. The primary argument here was that three-fourths of the earth's population lives in developing countries, a percentage that will continue to rise. Forty percent of all U.S. goods are now purchased by developing countries. The conclusion: the United States needs Third World markets.

Fourth, national security. One participant suggested that the man who said he just doesn't like "that damn foreign aid" should be asked if he prefers foreign military assistance to development assistance, because one way or another, America will invest in security.

The suggestion that development needs strong allies as it faces Congress was translated into advice: "coalesce." Make coalitions with other groups that share parts -- if not all -- of development's vision. "In Washington we see some amazing coalitions," said one participant.

The development leaders were warned that U.S. agriculture, especially, is a force that can be ignored only at development's peril. "Reach out to the farmers. They'll probably be resistant, but if you don't listen to them, you'll make enemies for your cause."

THE VISION

In his opening remarks Paarlberg told how in the early days of development, Third World countries had no basis for believing that agricultural development and the conquest of hunger were achievable objectives. Lacking the vision, he said, they lacked the will. "How could we instill such visions in the minds of people who had neither witnessed such things nor thought them possible?"

As the meeting wound down, discussion came back to the question of how to achieve the ultimate development goal of defeating hunger. Lowell Hardin, professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University, talked about the dream of some of development's pioneers 30 years ago.

"We hoped we could focus in on one tight, sharp goal like overcoming hunger and sell John Kennedy on the idea. He was young and aggressive and he wanted to make his mark. A group of scientists went in to talk with him. He sat in that rocking chair of his and rocked back and forth and finally he said, 'We're going to put a man on the moon.'

"What if he'd said, 'We're going to see that no one has to go to bed hungry'? Would we today be farther down the road toward eliminating hunger? We might."