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THE POLICY PERSPECTIVE:

ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The policy perspective: anthropology...

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When Richard Sinkin asked me to speak with you about the role of anthropology in A.I.D. policy, I accepted with pleasure mixed with trepidation. I am delighted at the opportunity to discuss with you the important role social science in general, and increasingly anthropology in particular, plays in A.I.D. But I am not an anthropologist and so I hope that you will forgive me if I stray too far from your own interests. I hope you will use the question period to bring me back to where you want me!

This afternoon I want to review why there has been a resurgence of attention to social science in A.I.D. and what we have accomplished thus far. I will also raise some unresolved issues that represent a challenge to both A.I.D. and anthropologists if we are to improve the relationship between the two.

I should note that the A.I.D. business--composed as it is of so many individual actions by thousands of individuals in over sixty sovereign countries--does not lend itself to the firmest and most precise of policymaking. While we do have basic policy direction from the Congress, the President and the A.I.D. Administrator, and this guidance is of course extremely important, real policy is often made in distant places by sensible people making sound decisions. I believe this situation is a great strength for A.I.D. - our field missions are a distinct asset - although it may occasionally frustrate more orderly minds. I admit that I am frustrated at not being able to declare a policy

This paper represents the work of many hands. I gratefully acknowledge the important role played by two anthropologists on my staff, Karen Poe and Joan Atherton, in consolidating the views of Agency personnel into this statement on the relationship between A.I.D. and social science.

and have it immediately understood and implemented. But that is not possible, and so it places a great premium on having excellent people in the organization, providing them with the best training, information, ideas, communication, and contract support we can provide, and then leaving them to do the job in concert with their host country colleagues. Thus, when we talk about policy let us keep in mind the number of people who have a role in making it. In particular, we must always recall that we work in sovereign nations where officials of the government may not share our views and approaches--including our interest in the nature of poverty in their country.

Many of you are aware--much more so than I--of the early history of anthropologist participation in overseas development programs. I am told that the foreign aid community development program was the nation's largest employer of anthropologists in the early 1950s. Not many survived the Transition following 1953. I also understand that some effort was made to bring anthropologists into the program in the early 1960's, but this did not last long.

Why has A.I.D. recently increased the use of anthropological knowledge and its employment of anthropologists? Changes in our approach to development have required it. To oversimplify, the failure of trickle down development to result in widespread equitable growth led to a rethinking of development policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Reflecting this shift--indeed

helping to lead it--the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973 (the New Directions legislation) required A.I.D. to focus its programs on poor people in poor countries. The emphasis is on growth with equity--helping meet basic human needs and achieving self-sustaining development with broad participation of people in shaping the economic and social changes that affect them. A.I.D. programs were to be concentrated on agriculture and rural development, health, population, education and, more recently, energy and the environment.

The major difference, as I see it, between the old and the new directions is that now we explicitly ask, in designing our programs, "Who benefits?" To answer that question, we realized we needed help from the social science community, especially those with knowledge of the societies within which we worked.

And so, about five years ago we decided to move along four paths:

- We tried to develop a framework for social analysis of projects and programs.
- We tried to get the benefit of social scientists with the needed talent in strategic spots for policy and program work.
- We tried to open up the recruitment of young people at the entry level for the general A.I.D. career program--the International Development Intern level--who would have a background in this kind of social science and who over the years would assume positions of management, program, and policy leadership.

- We tried to assure inclusion of this kind of social science in our in-service training programs.

The function of social analysis and the role of social scientists in A.I.D. are still in formative stages, but we have progressed in each of these areas, and as I understand it make much more use than most other donors of social science findings in our work.

During the past five years, A.I.D. has learned a great deal about improving the social impact of development interventions. Social analysis has now been built into every stage of A.I.D.'s programming process, starting at the project-level and recently working its way into formal policy papers. To cite a few pertinent milestones:

- Social analysis began in 1975 as a finite design task required in each A.I.D. project;
- It was then added to A.I.D. country development strategy formulation in 1978;
- The creation of a system of impact evaluations in 1979 significantly enhanced the attention to social analysis in evaluation;
- Anthropologists made a substantial contribution to our Agency Health Sector Policy Paper earlier this year, and we expect that future policy papers will continue to show the influence of social science;

-- We have now come full cycle and re-examined our guidelines on social analysis for individual projects. We have just amended this guidance to make assessment of social factors and potential for local participation come much earlier in our project design sequence.

Now that I've given you the stages of this process, let me put them in proper order, as they are actually supposed to occur. Two years ago, we introduced the Country Development Strategy Statement, or to use the acronym, CDSS. This document, prepared by each of A.I.D.'s major overseas missions and updated annually, provides a direction and rationale for A.I.D.'s program. The CDSS must include a discussion of the causes of poverty in the country, or in particular subcultures within that country, and develop from this analysis A.I.D.'s strategy for assistance. There are, of course, excellent opportunities for the anthropologist in the interpretation of the macrolevel situation to disaggregate different strata of poverty, identify interest groups or discuss issues of national integration, for example.

While anthropologists have yet to be effectively involved in all country strategy formulation efforts, each year the situation improves somewhat. Missions have asked for and received a great deal of short-term assistance from anthropologists and other social analysts, in both 1979 and 1980.

After the country strategy has been written and approved,

individual projects are designed which flow from this strategy. The project design phase is probably the one with which you are most familiar. A.I.D. introduced, with the pioneering help of several talented anthropologists, a social soundness analysis section into project design in 1975 as one of the instruments to give final shape and justification to development projects. It has been a very useful tool, but it has created and continues to create problems both for A.I.D. and for anthropologists or other social scientists who are charged with writing these analyses or reviewing projects for conformance with Agency policy.

By the time a project has reached the final design stage both A.I.D. and the host-government have negotiated the basic project: host-government and A.I.D. plans have been set in motion, budgets have often been calculated and egos committed. Only minor changes in projects are possible at this time. The anthropologist who runs up the red flag at this point tends to be viewed as meddling and negative, particularly if he or she is not able or not willing to suggest alternative courses of action. This is the worst possible time to advocate fundamental changes in project design, yet this is still the point when social analysis, in the majority of instances, first occurs.

We have gradually recognized this problem, and, have made changes in our project design requirements to involve social analysis earlier. We know that earlier involvement can help to smooth relationships between all our technical specialists, such as the

social analysts, and design officers who are often pulled in opposite directions by competing objectives and incentives in project design.

Turning this large ship around once we have learned some lessons takes time, but the process can work well as a recent Nepal project illustrates.

The CDSS identified the middle-hill or Rapati zone in Nepal as a priority poverty zone. Several A.I.D. anthropologists working with Nepali researchers conducted extensive social, economic, and ecological research in Rapati Province as a basis for designing interrelated agriculture, rural industry, family planning, health, education, and conservation projects that take into consideration such things as the role of local elites, bureaucratic ties between the local communities and the national level, and ways of improving delivery systems. The project design extends to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The implementation design is flexible so that if problems or opportunities arise, the project can shift gears to take these into account. The mission now hopes that this approach will be replicated in other districts in Nepal.

To complete the programming cycle and provide new information on which to base policy and implementation improvements, A.I.D., through an enhanced evaluation program, is analyzing the effects of its programs/projects over the long term on the

intended beneficiaries. Anthropologists and other behavioral scientists have played an important role in identifying the need for impact evaluations, in conceptualizing the impact evaluations in terms of what they measure and the criteria used to define success, and in carrying them out both as team leaders and team members.

Recently anthropologists have become major contributors to Agencywide policy documents. Perhaps the best example of this is the recent Health Sector Policy Paper. Some significant contributions were made in both background research and the actual writing of this document. It sets policy for incorporating traditional health care practitioners into health services delivery, for instance. And it mandates more attention to users of services such as domestic water supplies in addition to the more conventional emphasis on engineering feasibility.

There is no question in my mind as to the important contributions A.I.D. anthropologists make to Agency policy. From a handful just five years ago, there are now over 50 anthropologists in A.I.D. These individuals not only represent the perspective of their discipline, but also provide the continuity and commitment necessary in any bureaucracy to see the issues through to a satisfactory resolution. We benefitted greatly from having a senior anthropologist for policy in our Policy Bureau, and now see anthropologists emerging many places in A.I.D. where their voices can be heard. They are working as sector specialists, budget analysts

mission directors, evaluators, program officers, project review officers, trainers, and even occasionally as full time anthropologists!

There are still unresolved issues in A.I.D.'s relationship with anthropology, of course. Not all of these are policy matters but many do impinge on our ability to bring anthropology effectively into policymaking for foreign aid.

A.I.D. has not always used its anthropological talent efficiently. Junior anthropologists have sometimes been assigned positions in the Agency with insufficient attention to their specialized country knowledge and language skills, e.g., an Indonesia expert assigned to the Latin America Bureau or a Bolivia expert assigned to West Africa. Anthropologists, trained in long-term observation and analysis, have suffered by being used as short-term analysts. The requirement that social analysis be part of every project design has tended to place a premium on quick and dirty analysis rather than longer term analyses of the structure of poverty in developing countries.

Under present personnel policies, and probably in the future, career anthropologists in A.I.D. are faced with a difficult choice: will they remain specialists, conversant with the literature and with other practitioners of their discipline, or move to generalist positions, which offer greater opportunity for upward mobility and, ultimately, greater influence over A.I.D.'s programs? The latter path entails a conscious choice to surrender familiarity

with the day-to-day social science milieu, and has proven personally satisfying only for some of those who have tried it.

Most anthropologists have been with A.I.D. a short time and are relatively junior. The absence of senior anthropological leadership in A.I.D. has placed an added burden on this cadre of talent. I gather that many of these anthropologists believe that they are not being effectively used, that their roles are too narrowly defined, as doing poverty profiles or project social analyses, or that they are operating at the thin edge of their capabilities as they attempt to respond to the request to review every project in every country in the region in which they are working--yet they often lack the authority to communicate this to people in senior management positions who are making these decisions. Providing satisfying careers for social science specialists is a problem A.I.D. must confront or once again lose our talented anthropologists.

Unfortunately, I gather that there is still too much of an adversary relationship between A.I.D. generalists and anthropologists. Anthropologists are accused of being interested only in long-term research, of being narrowly trained as academics and incapable of adjusting to the realities of decisionmaking within a bureaucracy, of writing exotic treatises which have little to do with the task at hand, or of being incapable of translating social analyses into action plans for development, of dictating to interdisciplinary teams rather than sharing decisions as a member of such teams, of lacking technical

knowledge of the sector being analyzed, and of being reluctant to be agents of change.

Anthropologists on the other hand, accuse A.I.D. of misusing them, of not recognizing the need for culture-specific knowledge and language skills, of asking for too little social analysis too late, of being more concerned with transferring resources than helping poor people improve the quality of their lives, of speaking an equally exotic and almost foreign disciplinary language and being incapable of telling the anthropologist what information is needed for decisionmaking, of ignoring the anthropologist's warnings and proscriptions once they are given, and of excluding social analyses as an element in decisionmaking. There is also a legacy of the past in which A.I.D., as a government agency working abroad, provoked massive indifference or scorn from the anthropological community.

There are plainly no pat solutions for these issues. Some of the problems are shared with other technical specialists who elect to tackle development concerns from "inside" the foreign aid bureaucracy, and some are problems that reflect the particular relationship between anthropology and A.I.D.

The fact that we recognize these issues should help in finding solutions to them, and I am confident that with patience and realistic expectations we can provide great support to one another.

We are faced with a challenge--to build a creative partnership between the U.S. foreign assistance program and social sciences to solve the evergrowing and increasingly complex problems facing the countries of the Third World. A.I.D. has made a great deal of progress in developing sensitivity to the places and people we affect overseas. The hope is that we won't allow the tensions which exist between us to cause us to turn our backs on each other again as we did in the 1950s and 1960s.

As you see, our interest is in anthropologists not necessarily as anthropologists per se but as people who might make an effective contribution in the policy process and in running our program. As a practical matter, we are not a good home for people whose interest is in what has, I gather, become the traditional work of American anthropologists--teaching and publication of studies on subjects whose interest is determined by university peers, or in those whose interest or skill is limited to narrow field applications.

We have a better record in consulting anthropologists at the microlevel designing projects than at the macro policy level defining the development strategy for a particular sector or for a specific country. This is a function of social analysis coming at the end of the programming cycle rather than at each successive stage, and that social scientists have generally been brought in at the junior level.

Is anthropology ready to advise at the macro policy level? I think A.I.D. recognizes that it is often painful for an anthropologist to be called upon to generalize when your discipline teaches you to particularize. Not everyone is capable or willing to advise at the macro policy level. But, if universities only train anthropologists to be outsiders, then they will have limited impact. As in any organization the leadership in A.I.D. is reluctant to let outsiders become a significant part of macro level decisionmaking.

I am told that anthropology as a discipline has begun to shift its weight more solidly behind applied work in international development. We both know that it is not enough for anthropologists to document change and not enough to simply be advocates of certain ethnic groups. My colleagues tell me that anthropologists are increasingly indicating a willingness to become involved in the process of change. I encourage anthropology to study A.I.D. more closely to free us from the last vestiges of the old stereotype and to make an effort to find out and influence what A.I.D. programs are doing. The discipline should encourage rather than merely tolerate work in development by students and faculty members and do a better job lobbying funding agencies for more research money for applied work. To more effectively influence A.I.D. programs, university training might include, for example, the skills necessary to communicate to people in policy making positions so that anthropologists can bring their observations to bear in shaping development interventions; new research and observational

skills must be developed for the short time frame required for social analyses in most development projects.

I hope that the present involvement of anthropologists and anthropology in the U.S. foreign assistance program will have long-term and beneficial results for all of us. A.I.D. wants to meet this challenge, and will try. I hope you will join with us.