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REPORT OF THE A.I.D. AD HOC PANEL ON
EXTERNAL TECHNICAL ADVISORY ACTIVITY



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I. INTRODUCTION

A.I.D.'s research program is budgeted at \$369 million in FY 1993 (about \$1.5 billion for the four years from FY 1992 to FY 1995). This is a substantial investment in science and technology for development activities in the less-developed, transitional, and advanced developing countries. Moreover, this program has had profound impact on the research agendas of the wider international development community. The U.S. science effort in general will continue to leverage resources for research endeavors in the development world, and A.I.D.'s research program will remain a catalyst for both U.S. and international research programs.

No matter how the foreign assistance program is organized, U.S. national interests will require that the U.S. sustain its leadership in international development activities and continue to draw on its extraordinary base of science and technological knowledge and institutional capacities. Science and technology will continue to be important in issues related to, e.g., population growth and migrations; the spread of destructive viruses and addictive drugs; the importance of stimulating environmentally sustainable economic growth; and the building of linkages between U.S. professional communities and institutions and their counterparts abroad. There will be growing U.S. concern about worldwide poverty and massive demands for humanitarian relief as well as with economic opportunities for trade and investment. With

the demise of communism as the dominating rationale for U.S. foreign assistance, development issues may emerge as pivotal concerns for U.S. foreign relations in the future.

In this setting, assurance about the relevance, quality, and effective use of research for development is important to the U.S., to other donor nations, and to developing countries. Science and technology are vital to the anticipation of future development issues that will affect all countries. In this connection A.I.D., as part of its internal discussions on future management concerns and program goals, has commissioned a review of external advisory mechanisms and policies.

II. THE PROBLEM

The Review panel on A.I.D.'s External Technical Advisory Activity met in Rosslyn, Virginia, during the week of February 9-12, 1993, to assess the provision of research services to A.I.D. from the U.S. scientific and technical community. After discussions with A.I.D. colleagues and extensive internal deliberation, the panel modified its charge to focus on the assessment of advisory mechanisms at various A.I.D. levels and to present an evaluation in broad terms. The central concern may be stated as follows: how can A.I.D. strengthen its overall capacity to obtain, and use, external technical advice, especially at the sectoral and strategic levels? Additionally, how does A.I.D.

mobilize external sources of scientific knowledge in order to effectively link its research effort to development goals? With the research effort totaling \$370 million for FY 1993, it is evident that a five-year plan for research goals will be a key element in A.I.D.'s overall effectiveness.

Based on these considerations, this report will provide:

- o an assessment of the hierarchy of advisory needs;
- o a review of the major options available to meet advisory needs; and
- o suggestions for approaching issues for A.I.D. consideration.

The panel proceeds from the assumption that A.I.D. may face potentially dramatic changes in its mission and organizational structure in the near future. Budget pressures will continue to be an unpleasant reality. The roles of all foreign policy agencies may change. Thus an advisory system must present timely advice and be flexible enough to respond to and anticipate shifts in the A.I.D. mission. Technical assistance and the division of development efforts into broad sectors, e.g., health, population, agriculture, environment, democratization, development of market economies, will likely remain part of any foreseeable A.I.D. mission even if budgets are reduced or new program emphases emerge from policy review.

III. LEVELS OF ADVISORY NEEDS AND ADEQUACY OF CURRENT MECHANISMS

The hierarchy of A.I.D. advisory needs may be characterized in terms of project, program, and sectoral levels. Each level requires technical expertise, but expertise of an increasingly multi-disciplinary character as one proceeding from more precisely-defined technical issues (e.g., evaluation of specific research proposals, individual research projects) to program concerns (e.g., evaluation of the coherence of various project clusters, priority setting) and thence to the contribution of different component parts of an overall program to intra- and intersectoral issues. Each advisory level requires technical expertise, but the integrative and synthesizing element increases at each level.

In addition to these major categories there is an additional mixed technical/policy area. This includes a need to anticipate new technical areas that will have wide-ranging policy implications (e.g., monitoring of the HIV/AIDs infection and its impact on development) and to address broad policy matters with technical dimensions.

A.I.D. appears satisfied with the advice it receives at the levels of peer review evaluation of specific projects and research proposals. The management of these advisory services is broadly decentralized and often incorporated into the functions of intermediary contractors, cooperative agreements or grants.

However, the panel is not convinced that these are effective "advisory" functions or that they reflect a uniformly high level of scientific competence. Rather, some existing technical committees at project levels seem to reflect mainly the viewpoints of A.I.D. contractors responsible for the projects. The test of disinterestedness in technical advice is not met when a traditional A.I.D. contractor comments on its own project performance.

Similarly, program advice is generally seen as adequate in quality, but here the panel senses uncertainty and mixed views among A.I.D. colleagues. There is a tendency for program clusters to develop patterns of protective or self-interested advice; hence a relatively narrow group of experts may predominate. The external advisory inputs may thus reflect and reinforce, rather than transcend, parochial outlooks. Finally, the erosion of internal technical competence is a factor impeding A.I.D.'s ability to take full advantage of external expertise.

At the sectoral level, nearly all the panel interviewees perceived an acute problem. When A.I.D. officials attempt to weigh conflicting outlooks and program emphases or to devise research strategies crossing sectoral boundaries, the absence of useful advisory mechanisms is a serious problem. The anticipatory or long-range advisory function, in the judgment of many interviewees, has tended to be weak and underdeveloped. Major efforts should be made to address advisory needs in programs on democratization and

economic reform; sectoral advisory needs in the health, population, agriculture, and environment areas; and cross-sectoral priority-setting. At these levels, (and in these areas), the advising function should include expertise from the less developed, transitional, and advanced developing countries. This is important to ensure relevance and to create relationships of mutual respect and cooperation.

IV. A.I.D.'S CAPACITY TO OBTAIN AND USE EXTERNAL TECHNICAL ADVICE

In the past decade, 45 - 100 advisory committees have been established by A.I.D. at the program level to serve specific technical needs. A.I.D.'s capacity to make effective use of this external technical advice has been hampered by a number of internal factors. At various times, advising committees have been too closely linked to the R&D Bureau to provide unbiased advice. Some committees have lacked adequate internal staff support, and others have suffered from a poorly-focused agenda or unclear charge.

The proliferation of such advisory bodies sometimes caused conflict with the now-disbanded Research Advisory Committee (RAC), which sought to serve the R&D Bureau as a whole. The RAC never successfully managed to convert from a research project committee to a research program committee, as envisaged in the 1991 A.I.D. reorganization. By being asked to review narrow issues, the RAC

inevitably was put in the position of "second-guessing" other A.I.D. advisory groups. However, the critique of outside panels may have been useful as a means to assess the close-knit and sometimes inbred pattern of contractor-Agency ties. The causes of the RAC's problems leading to its revocation are complex and cannot be fully reviewed here. However, the panel notes a few contributory problems: the composition of the RAC was not always suited to its advisory mission; the mission lacked clear definition; adequate staff support was lacking; the customer or client for the advice was not clearly defined; A.I.D. leadership and RAC leadership were not attuned; and the RAC itself at times lacked effective leadership.

Since the RAC's demise in December 1992, the only based advisory body serving A.I.D. has been the BIFADEC. Over time, the original effectiveness of the BIFADEC appears to have diminished. It is presently viewed mainly as an instrument reflecting the particular interests of the land-grant agricultural research community. It has not performed a useful function in identifying salient health, environmental, population, or non-agricultural issues, or in making useful contributions to such emerging issues as democratic governance, the development of legal institutions, or public finance. BIFADEC is not effective in tapping into the resources of the broader scientific and educational community of the U.S. to identify and assess development needs of the 1990s and beyond.

V. A.I.D.'S RELATIONS WITH THE BOARD ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (BOSTID) AND THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (NRC)

Among other activities, BOSTID reviews research proposals from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as an advisory service to A.I.D. BOSTID regards its HBCU proposal review function as a service, but this is not the kind of broad-gauged analytical effort most suitable to the NRC style of operation. For such operational assistance, A.I.D. should seek an alternative institutional arrangement as soon as practicable. This would free up resources within BOSTID for workshops, panel sessions, and other forms of analytical assistance which it carries out effectively. Many other entities exist to organize peer review of research proposals on a contractual basis, and a number of non-profit or other agencies have carried out such functions successfully with A.I.D. support.

A.I.D. officials appear to have been generally pleased with the quality of BOSTID workshops and panels. This review panel believes that this is partly attributable to BOSTID's more flexible and informal manner of operation with such relatively quick response efforts, as compared with the NRC's formal studies and reports. BOSTID and other NRC in-depth studies have been regarded in less favorable terms by some A.I.D. colleagues, mostly because NRC/NAS study and internal review procedures are extremely lengthy.

In summary, the panel believes that the Agency's reliance on BOSTID in 1986, has proved to be a useful source of advice and of analytical assistance to A.I.D. The relationship should, however, be restructured if it is to be continued. Peer review of HBCU proposals has not been the most useful role for BOSTID.

BOSTID's most valuable input, in the panel's judgment, has come via the workshop or technical panel format. BOSTID should continue to be used in this context. The panel advises, however, that BOSTID should not alone be relied on to fill A.I.D.'s needs for broad-gauged advice.

The panel recommends that A.I.D. continue its association with BOSTID, but on a more modest scale. The "core" program (in FY '93 amounting to \$1.4 million of BOSTID's \$2 million A.I.D. effort of its total \$7 million budget) should be focused on a series of workshops and technical panels. These would not usually result in a formal NRC report or book. Any additional studies with BOSTID or other NRC units should be negotiated on an ad hoc basis, according to the criteria--i.e., time for completion, major importance, long lead-time--suggested above.

The NRC in general should continue to conduct studies for A.I.D. as appropriate. The panel suggests that the NRC should be reserved for major studies requiring long lead-times and exhaustive review on particularly controversial and complex issues.

Alternatively, A.I.D. should focus its study requests on narrow aspects of larger issues which could be completed quickly by the NRC.

VI. IS A NEW RAC OR AGENCY-WIDE ADVISORY BODY NEEDED?

The panel devoted considerable attention to the issue of a RAC-like advisory function for A.I.D. The re-formulation of the A.I.D.-BOSTID role could serve part of the need for Bureau-wide or A.I.D.-wide technical advice. However, the panel believes that in the future RAC and/or an even broader development Council, similar to that devised by Administrator David E. Bell in the mid-1960s, could be useful to A.I.D. The establishment of such a council should only be undertaken when A.I.D. leadership is fully committed to the concept of external advice. Without the full confidence and support of A.I.D.'s senior leadership, no high-level advisory body can function effectively.

The panel believes that there is a need to relate A.I.D.'s extensive technical efforts to its wider policy goals and to use the research function as a mechanism for addressing anticipated problems. There is a lack of consonance between current A.I.D. technical efforts and the needs of a 21st century development strategy. A.I.D. has moved increasingly away from an exclusive agricultural focus; future technical areas such as democracy, popular participation, governance, the building of institutional

capacity, and privatization are likely to increase in importance. A mix of internal and external expertise should evolve accordingly. A.I.D. direct-hires have increasingly reflected "process" expertise rather than either traditional scientific competence or other skills such as economics, law, or public finance. The problem is exacerbated by the increasingly numerous prohibitions, directives, conditions, and mandates in foreign aid legislation. A 1989 Task Force chaired by Representative Lee Hamilton found that "Earmarks have increased to unprecedented levels....The result is an aid program that is driven by process rather than by content and substance."

A Development Council could assist A.I.D. in goal definition and in policy review in the rapidly-changing post-communist world. The charter for such a Council, its composition, and its organizational linkage to A.I.D. would have to be carefully developed. Clearly, the confidence of A.I.D.'s leadership in such a council would be a critical variable.

A new RAC and/or broader advisory body could be large, as is the EPA's science advisory committee. The EPA committee rarely functions as a plenary body, but works mainly through subgroups. A new RAC could be smaller and could reach out to consultants as needed following the pattern of the Defense Science Board. In whichever way such a body is structured, it should be supported with a staff or with a contract support function, and with a budget

adequate to ensure that it would be able to deliver services enough of the quality required by A.I.D. and as perceived by the public.

The mission of cross-sectoral review of A.I.D.'s research efforts is separate from the broad policy review role. The panel believes that the composition of such an advisory group reporting to the R&D Bureau should be closely coordinated with the current or revised Policy Directorate. Such a group would be more "technical" and less reliant on political, legal, or organizational expertise than a broad policy development council (although close knowledge of A.I.D. is important for any advisory bodies). The panel believes that A.I.D. should evaluate its current pattern of advisory committees at sectoral and program levels with a view to develop new or revised charters and procedures. The panel makes no suggestions for a uniform system to apply to all sectors; A.I.D. officials might find a variety of arrangements satisfactory. The goal is for A.I.D. to tap into the most current scientific knowledge and fully exploit the nation's rich intellectual and scientific resources in project and program design.

The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) would apply to such an advisory body, unless it were attached to (or operated through) a contractual "utilized" body. "Utilized" institutions could include the NRC, the NAS, various states' Academies of Science, the AAAS, a consulting firm, or other A.I.D contractor.

VII. RELATIONSHIP OF A.I.D. TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT

As A.I.D. reappraises its external advisory mechanisms, complex issues of overlapping jurisdiction will emerge. The convergence of development objectives with broader foreign policy interests will also require review and appraisal. Secretary of State Warren Christopher has reorganized the State Department, creating new positions at the Undersecretary level which will have a bearing on the A.I.D. mission and operations. A.I.D. should seek constructive dialogue with senior State Department officials on the long-term development objectives of the U.S. and on effective public-private partnerships in technical assistance. Both the traditional developing countries and the nations of the former Soviet Empire will be important constituencies in the future.

As communism recedes, development goals are likely to become a new focus of foreign policy. A.I.D. should be a vigorous participant in this debate and will gain a following mainly in relation to how well it articulates broad national goals in addition to Agency interests. A reconstituted State Department Science Advisory Committee, serving the Secretary of State through the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs and the Undersecretary for Global Affairs, could be a useful forum for debating technical assistance and development goals.

A series of recent reports has voiced criticism of A.I.D.'s capacities to mobilize the resources of the U.S. scientific community to assist the development effort. The Carnegie Commission on Science and Technology and Government in its report on Partnerships for Global Development noted an erosion of A.I.D.'s internal technical capacities, rigidities in contracting procedures, failure to exploit new technical advances in many fields, and other shortcomings. It called for a clearer policy focus from political leadership in the White House and Congress, a change in the A.I.D. appropriation law, greater decentralization to the field and enhancement of the host country role, and greater involvement of the nation's scientific community at all levels as a central core of a development strategy suited for the new international order.

That a distinguished group of citizens found significant shortcomings with A.I.D.'s outreach to the scientific community should be a cause for serious concern. This panel senses a failure of senior A.I.D. officials to grasp fully the lessons of the Carnegie Commission and other reports. There is a defensive tendency within A.I.D. that dismisses outside scientific inputs as lacking relevance for development needs. The full potential for partnerships between U.S. scientific institutions and host country institutions cannot be realized with the mind-set of the 1960s. The budget reductions announced in President Clinton's February 1993 Economic Message indicate the seriousness of A.I.D.'s problems

in building a base of public support for the future. The nation's scientific community will be critical to the mission of devising a secure rationale for foreign assistance and for leveraging reduced resources into a strong development assistance effort. The "aid fatigue" syndrome noted by various observers can only be combated by imaginative outreach to the wider attentive public.

We believe that A.I.D. must rethink its hiring practices, internal operations, contracting procedures, and relationship to the private sector in order to achieve a more effective and synergistic role for science and technology in its development effort. A thorough external review of the technical assistance functions should be an integral part of an overall development strategy for the next decade. In principle, foreign assistance could become a more important instrument of U.S. foreign policy. But if A.I.D. does not enjoy the full confidence of the attentive public, a precipitous drop in budgetary support and neglect by senior policy-makers are also possible. A "blue-ribbon commission," established early in the term of a new A.I.D. Administrator, could be useful. A Development Council or new RAC could then, as a follow-up measure, help A.I.D. implement new strategies emerging from the work of the commission. The potential contribution of such a commission, as well as the possible pitfalls if the concept is not carefully implemented, should be discussed with the Administrator-designee as an important early priority.

VIII. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Major Findings:

a. In any situation that may develop in the organization of foreign assistance, technical assistance in several broad areas of development will likely continue. Such assistance will require an external technical advisory system that is timely in its advice and flexible enough to respond to and anticipate shifts in the U.S. foreign assistance mission.

b. There is a hierarchy of advisory needs related to the project, program, and sectoral levels. Each level requires technical expertise but expertise of increasingly multi-disciplinary character is necessary as one proceeds from projects to programs to sectors. The integrative and synthesizing element increases at each level.

c. In addition, beyond these needs lies a mix of technical/policy issues in development, including the need to anticipate new technical areas. These issues should be addressed with the advice of a high level external technical advisory activity.

d. A.I.D. needs to develop its internal technical capacities and modes of operation so that it can reach out effectively to the U.S. and international scientific community and develop partnerships

with U.S. scientific institutions. Also it needs to involve the scientific expertise of the least developed, transitional, and advanced developing countries in its advisory activities.

2. Recommendations:

a. At the project level, the panel questions whether the "advisory" functions are effective and represent a uniformly high level of scientific competence. Also at the program level, the external advice seems adequate but, as at the project level, there is some uncertainty and mixed views about the tendency for the programs to develop a pattern of protective or self-interested advice. A.I.D. may, thus, wish to undertake a special review of the numbers, types, relationships, and competence of the external technical advisory services at these levels.

b. A common concern was the quality of external technical advice at the sectoral level. It was viewed as weak and underdeveloped. We suggest that the Agency consider forming a new type of RAC to address sectoral level research topics. There are alternative approaches noted in the report. A new RAC should take into consideration the range of cross sectoral topics for which advisory services are required, the linkages with Agency research and operations staffs, the inclusion of experts from the developing countries, and any actions resulting from a review of project and program technical advice activities (see 2.a above) and from

considerations on forming a development council.

c. A.I.D.'s internal capacity to make use of technical advisory activities is weak. Thus, in any reformation of the Agency, efforts should be made to strengthen its in-house technical expertise, its management of advisory committee agendas and staff support, and systems for follow-up on use of the advice.

d. We question whether the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development and Economic Cooperation (BIFADEC), now the only broad advisory body serving the Agency, is the most suitable arrangement for tapping into the U.S. scientific and educational community to address the development needs of the coming decades. The Agency may, thus, wish to consider discontinuing BIFADEC in its present form and integrate its advisory functions into alternative arrangements.

e. The Board for Science and Technology for International Development (BOSTID) has provided valuable advisory services for the Agency over many years. This relationship should continue. However, we suggest that future activity be focused on workshops and technical panels. Additional studies by BOSTID or other NRC units should be arranged on an ad hoc basis taking into careful account the importance of the study as it relates to the timeframe for study completion. In areas where BOSTID does not have the expertise, the Agency may wish to develop comparable relationships

with other widely respected research organizations.

f. To address the broad issues of development policy and research linkages, we suggest that the new Administrator establish a Development Council, comparable to the one set up in the first years of A.I.D. in the early 1960s. This council would advise the Administrator and Agency on broad development priorities as a guide for both research and program activities. It would assist in weighing the relative importance of resource allocations among major development thrusts and on development issues on the horizon. Forming such a council should be an action of the new Administrator with his/her full commitment to making use of its advisory services.

g. To help start off the work of this development council, we suggest that A.I.D. consider organizing a special National Commission on International Development Priorities for the 21st Century. This could be organized with the assistance of BOSTID or carried out by BOSTID itself. The State Department and other U.S. agencies with related objectives could participate as a step toward building the intergovernmental linkages that will be required for effective development activities in the future.

PERSONS INTERVIEWED

John Daly	AID/R&D/R
Ralph Smuckler	AID/R&D/UC
Michael McDonald Dow	NAS/BOSTID
Jay Davenport	NAS/AID Project Coordinator
Hiram Larew	AID/POL/SP
Pat Peterson	AID/R&D/AGR
Brad Langmaid	DAA/FA
Ruth Frischer	AID/R&D/UC

APPENDIX II

U.S. COMMISSIONS ON FOREIGN AID

<u>Instigator</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Commission Name</u>	<u>Chairman</u>
Dwight D. Eisenhower	1958-59	President's Commission to Study the United States Military Assistance Program	William Draper
John F. Kennedy	1962-63	Committee to Strengthen the Security of the Free World	Lucius Clay
Richard M. Nixon	1969-70	Presidential Task Force on International Development	Peter Peterson
Ronald Reagan	1983	Commission on Security and Economic Assistance	Frank Carlucci
House of Representatives	1988	Task Force of the House Foreign Affairs Committee	Lee Hamilton
George Bush	1991	Management of AID Programs	George Ferris
Carnegie Commission	1992	Partnership for Global Development	Jimmy Carter