

USAID Performance Monitoring and Evaluation News

Notes . . . Reviews . . . Perspectives

Evaluation Quality Has Slid Since Mid-'90s, Team Finds

Agency Must Regain Control, Improve Rigor of Studies

USAID IS PERFORMING an insufficient number of evaluations, and those that are being done too often are linked with success stories, giving them an air of PR.

Those are two of the conclusions drawn in "Evaluation of Recent Evaluation Experience," a study commissioned by CDIE. The February 2001 Working Paper (PN-ACG-632) is coauthored by Cynthia Clapp-Wincek, who worked as an evaluator for USAID for 14 years, and Richard Blue, a retired senior foreign service officer.

The raw numbers are suggestive. Year 1994 was the high-water mark—497—

for operating unit evaluations submitted to USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse. In 1999 only 136 were submitted.

The falling numbers reflect in large part a 1995 change to the Automated Directives System that decreased evaluation requirements. The change was generally welcomed. As one USAID manager noted, "[The change allows] USAID to avoid the rote, pro forma, expensive, and on occasion fruitless evaluation exercises of the past."

That was the expectation. In practice, however, that was not predominantly what happened. "On the whole," write

Clapp-Wincek and Blue, "what we found in the database and the fieldwork continued to be largely the pro forma, although not rote, evaluations that looked much like those of the early 1990s."

DOWNPLAYING FORMAL EVALUATIONS

The authors find as well that many "evaluations" the missions reported completing were closer to narrower, less formal assessments or monitoring documents. Like evaluations, assessing and monitoring are valuable tools for measuring progress. Unlike evaluations, they have a relatively small audience, are less rigorous, and do not expose and analyze problems.

The authors recognize that a balance is needed between monitoring and evaluation. They find, though, that monitoring has largely squeezed out evaluations. A program officer in Armenia noted:

see Evaluations, page 4

Democracy Linkages Are Enhancing Development

But Agency Culture and Practices Impede Potential

SEVERAL POST-COLD WAR circumstances—government downsizing, shifts in practitioners' thinking about development, conducive host-country situations—have prompted creative USAID staff to link democracy and governance (DG) activities with those of the Agency's other strategic goals. As a result, democratic principles such as participation, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness are now being systematically incorporated into USAID's

environmental, health, education, and economic growth efforts.

A new POA report, *Linking Democracy and Development: An Idea for the Times*, finds that DG linkages with other sectors are an emerging development success story. They promote democratic development and help achieve sectoral objectives. Reinforced by DG's ability to serve as both a means and an end, they support USAID's overall sustainable development

Quotable

“We are not an island alone anymore. And the investments we make overseas will redound to our credit in due course.**”**

—U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE COLIN POWELL,
IN TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FOREIGN OPERATIONS

mission. But the report also finds that the Agency's operating environment and institutional culture are barriers to the very collaboration on which such activities depend.

see Linkages, page 2

Linkages

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Linking Democracy and Development caps a study of linkages between DG and USAID's other strategic goals (conducted jointly by CDIE, Global Bureau's Center for Democracy and Governance, and Africa Bureau's Office of Sustainable Development). The report draws on interviews at USAID/Washington and field studies carried out in the late 1990s at seven Agency missions: the Dominican Republic, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, the Philippines, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

PERFORMANCE BOOSTED

Study teams found that significant results were achieved by using democratic principles in projects concerned with forestland use, rural economic development, health service delivery, and parents' involvement in their children's education. On numerous occasions, linked activities produced synergy: the sum of sectoral achievements and increased democratic governance was greater than the individual results achievable independently.

USAID/Guinea, for example, blended rural economic development with efforts to improve democratic governance at the local level. It ended up with a project that not only generated close to 230 profitable activities at the midpoint but also helped improve local officials' performance and increase citizen participation in local affairs. In Guinea, the Philippines, and elsewhere, this sort of activity has taught citizens how to be more involved in development, exercise their rights, and hold public officials accountable. At the same time, government authorities have become more responsive, transparent, and effective.

COLLABORATION, LEADERSHIP ARE KEY

Linked activities have been developed and carried out in many ways. They have been incorporated in strategic-planning

documents and have become part of revised internal mission organizational structures. They have become part of the way strategic objective team members do their work. In addition, mission staff emphasized the importance of retreats, joint site visits, and including collaboration in annual work objectives. They noted that most cross-sectoral interaction takes place in meetings and informal contacts.

Ultimately, though, it was key individuals who brought together such structural and operational factors to make cross-sectoral activities possible and, over time, to help establish a culture of synergy. In USAID/Madagascar, for example, a succession of mission directors placed a high value on coordination and made management flexibility a constant. This helped inculcate a common vision and commitment among staff, which in turn moved cross-sectoral linkages from inception to implementation to becoming a feature of the way the mission does business.

OBSTACLES REMAIN

Several obstacles have impeded DG linkages. The Agency's strategic framework and results reporting and review procedures create barriers between sectors by reinforcing independent treatment of strategic objectives. Because reporting and review procedures have no way of readily accounting for results in more than one sector, USAID is not getting the credit it should for accomplishments achieved through DG linkages. Moreover, linkages are simply not part of the Agency's culture. There is little incentive to pursue them; even if staff try to do so, they find scant guidance and no clear constituency for such efforts. Though the record of success demonstrates that these obstacles can be overcome, they often have a chilling effect when such activities are being considered and result in added staff time and effort.

Linking Democracy and Development concludes that DG linkages with other sectors need to become an intrinsic part of USAID's culture and operations. It suggests that collaboration could be made part of employees' annual work objectives and that linkages could be incorporated in country strategic plans in all USAID missions. To eliminate impediments caused by difficulties with Agency attribution, reporting, and review procedures, annual guidance on reporting could stipulate that results of DG-linked activities be incorporated in the narrative under each strategic objective. Finally, to increase awareness and understanding of DG linkages, mission directors could make a presentation on their potential utility during the annual Agency mission directors' conference in Washington.

The printed document will be available soon; prerelease copies may be obtained from Hal Lippman at (202) 712-1339 or hlippman@usaid.gov.

—HAL LIPPMAN

USAID Performance Monitoring and Evaluation News Notes ... Reviews ... Perspectives

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Gauging Civil Society Assistance

Essayists From Donor and Recipient Countries Weigh In

CIVIL SOCIETY, a term seldom heard 15 years ago, is today considered a necessary component of the democracy promotion efforts of Western aid agencies, private foundations, and international nongovernmental organizations. Civil society assistance now accounts for nearly half of USAID's democracy and governance budget. *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*, edited by Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (and published this past year), examines the return donors are getting on their investment.

The meat of the book is 10 essays—2 each covering Africa, Asia, eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East—authored alternately by an American or Western European researcher with hands-on experience in one of those regions and by a citizen of that region who has extensive experience in civil society development. The strength of the collection is the diversity of its attention. From South Africa (where civil society brought down apartheid with minimal donor help) to Latin America (where democratically elected government has had a remarkable recent run, compared with the region's nondemocratic past) to the Philippines (where donors and beneficiaries have teamed to make the country an “NGO superpower”), *Funding Virtue* assesses how effectively donor assistance is giving voice to the voiceless.

The book asks

- What conceptions of civil society do aid providers employ, and how do these conceptions relate to local realities in the recipient countries?
- Where do programs make a difference?

- How can civil society aid be improved?

WHICH PARTS OF SOCIETY ARE ‘CIVIL’?

Defining civil society is tricky to the layman, but according to *Funding Virtue* there is a scholarly consensus around a broad view of it:

An intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations that are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or extend their interests or values.

Such organizations include trade unions, professional organizations, advocacy groups, social networks, philanthropic institutions, parent–teacher associations, bowling leagues. Some Western definitions of civil society exclude both religious institutions and tribal and communal entities, even though these are cornerstones of civil society in many non-Western countries. That distinction has major implications for how U.S. assistance is directed, particularly to countries with large Muslim populations.

Egypt, the most populous Arab nation, gets more U.S. assistance than any other country. According to Western contributor Imco Brouwer, Egypt “has a vibrant but heavily controlled civil society in which groups with an Islamic identity play an important role.” But Egyptian contributor Mustapha Kamel Al-Sayyid says it has become convenient for the Egyptian government “to accuse of being a terrorist anyone who [has] proclaimed that Islam can be the source of inspiration for socioeconomic, political, and moral reform.” He adds that “in reality, many Islamic NGOs are

apolitical, engaged mainly in charitable activities, or led by government sympathizers.” Because the United States is more concerned with maintaining political stability in the Middle East than with empowering every citizen there, no U.S. civil society aid goes to such organizations.

WHAT KINDS OF PROGRAMS SUCCEED?

Western contributor Stephen Golub distinguishes between two types of civil society assistance—what he calls “Big D” and “small d” democracy aid. Big D attempts to make judiciaries, legislatures, political parties, and other core institutions operate fairly and effectively. Small d aims for socioeconomic progress for disadvantaged people. He finds that development experience worldwide suggests that recipients get the most from small-d assistance—that which targets specific issues of immediate interest to them: “Battered women, subsistence farmers, street vendors, and urban squatters usually respond far better to appeals to their legitimate self-interest than to their democratic spirit.”

The explosion of civil society assistance followed the end of the Cold War and the consequent opening of formerly communist eastern Europe to Western capital. Donor governments and foundations at first aimed their assistance at reforming government institutions. But as new organizations within transitional countries began to proliferate, donors saw that grants as small as \$20,000—a pittance compared with the sums needed to make judicial reforms—could make a huge difference to them.

The editors emphasize in a concluding chapter that their research in several countries indicates “that women’s NGOs are among the most successful in connecting to local constituencies.” And they say civil society aid has made its clearest impact in creating and sustaining a large number of indigenous NGOs.

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Evaluations

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“There is probably a monitoring report we should send to Washington, but this assessment memo, limited to internal distribution, is more useful and more efficient.” The authors comment: “When pressed by many demands and priorities, ‘useful and efficient’ is the right choice. The loss is the documentation and sharing of lessons.”

Not only is the Agency conducting fewer evaluations, but also many evaluations that are being produced are being done not by USAID but by its partners. Not since the 1970s, the authors observe, have USAID staff actually carried out the bulk of U.S. foreign assistance programs. Agency staff are divorced from a hands-on role in development. Government downsizing has accelerated the “wholesaling” of development through subcontractors and grantees. The evaluation process was no exception.

This trend can have an upside. Contractors may have a genuine interest in ferreting out and assessing information to gauge whether they are meeting their contractual obligations. Indeed, private voluntary organizations and others often initiate evaluations on their own to accomplish this.

But if contractors are learning from the evaluations, USAID is not. Agency managers, particularly busy team leaders, skim

reports and react to the most pressing actions needed. Only the most committed managers, though, find time to do the evaluations themselves. “Real learning takes place not through reading reports,” the authors argue, “but by going out and asking the questions directly.”

KNOWLEDGE AS A COMMODITY

Another concern with privately conducted evaluations is that knowledge becomes a commodity. An evaluation may contain information potentially useful to a competitor—procurement data, for example. The evaluating organization may push for nondisclosure of the report, or for delaying its release until the potential value of the information is dissipated. Conversely, rules prohibit an organization that carries out an evaluation from bidding on follow-on work. That can squelch a contractor’s enthusiasm to do evaluations.

A hallmark of government reengineering of the early 1990s was to link budgets to positive results. That had a consequence that might have been, but was not, foreseen: it became risky to report anything other than success. That in turn calls into question the independence of evaluation findings and conclusions. “Not only can evaluations start to look like PR,” observe Clapp–Wincek and Blue, “but the Agency needs a mechanism to know on balance how its activities are doing. . . . ‘Success’ was far too prevalent for an evaluator to feel comfortable.”

THE TASK AHEAD

How, then, does the Agency get back on the right evaluation track? The authors offer some observations and recommendations. Among them:

- Develop an evaluation handbook directed at both USAID and its development partners. Update the handbook on a regular basis.
- Gear more evaluations at the strategic objective level, rather than at the more micro activity level.
- As USAID does less of its own implementation, the Agency’s direct-hire staff should do more of their own evaluations. People learn differently when they are out in the world asking the questions than they do sitting in an office scanning a report.
- Since staff resources are tight and fewer evaluations are being done, those that are conducted should be of the highest quality.

Evaluation, the authors find, can be a powerful tool to identify lessons learned and to improve the quality of the work of all partners involved in the development process. But evaluations must be candid and unvarnished if they are to be useful to upper level managers. In this vein, the authors conclude, “there is much to be done to reestablish evaluation as a means by which truth speaks to power.”

—ROSS BANKSON

Civil Society

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HOW TO IMPROVE

Though many democratic theorists consider civil society *the* greatest force for democracy, *Funding Virtue* recognizes the inherent paradox of promoting civil society as a method of democracy-building: promoting democracy means

pushing the United States’ own democratic values, while true civil society allows for self-determination.

Even so, the authors generally agree that Western public and private donors are correct to support civil society development and should continue doing so. Their major criticism: a disproportionately large amount of such assistance has gone to

Westernized NGOs engaged in public interest advocacy—at least through 2000. Ottaway and Carothers ask donors to continue to expand the range of organizations they seek to assist. In countries where emergent civil societies are at odds with their governments, they advise, the United States and other donors should keep a low profile and proceed cautiously.

—MICHAEL HOPPS

When Do Partnerships Help Advance USAID Goals?

CDIE Presents a Guide to Improving and Sustaining Private Alliances

SINCE USAID'S INCEPTION, many of its activities have involved support for partnerships between U.S.-based and overseas entities. But until the early 1990s the Agency devoted relatively little attention to the organizational characteristics of the partnership process. Partnerships were viewed as secondary to the goal of supporting a project, program, or sectoral enhancement.

Following the growing realization that a better understanding of partnership relations affects the results they can help achieve, CDIE has created a guide to improving the effectiveness and sustainability of partnerships: *Designing and Managing Partnerships Between U.S. and Host-Country Entities* (PN-ACG-627), by Chanya Charles and C. Stark Biddle. The guide is for USAID staff, for intermediary organizations the Agency has chosen to develop partnerships, and for the partners themselves. It follows the steps a USAID field mission, regional entity, or Washington office might take when considering use of a partnership to achieve a strategic or special objective.

While the term "partnerships" refers to many types of relationships, the type described in *Designing and Managing Partnerships* is a voluntary collaboration between two or more entities (American and host country) where the parties have agreed to cooperate to achieve mutually desirable objectives. The guide highlights 27 case studies of such partnerships: hospital to hospital, university to university, city to city, business to business, U.S. private voluntary organization to host-country nongovernmental organization, PVO to commercial organization. The main text describes how to design and manage a partnership program, but the appendixes offer the guide's most practical benefits: sample memorandums of understanding, work plan guides,

sustainability plans, and partnership behavior assessment tools.

WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS

Partnerships are associated with faster organizational learning, increased technical and managerial resources, improved capacity to adapt to change, and better prospects for financial and organizational sustainability. They can improve the technical and managerial ability of host-country organizations and add to the experience base of the American groups.

But a partnership involves specific tensions, and its outcome may seem less predictable than an outcome resulting from a traditional contracting arrange-

ment. Partnerships can be unstable and expensive to support and maintain. They often take a long time to get started. And their success frequently hinges on factors hard to obtain and manage: trust, good communication, cross-cultural sensitivity.

Designing and Managing Partnerships outlines points USAID staff should consider while determining whether the overall effort to achieve a specific result could be strengthened by a partnership program (see table). Ultimately, the decision should be based not only on the utility of the partnership to achieve a tangible result but also on the added benefits that come from the process of partnering.

see Partnerships, page 8

Deciding Whether to Use Partnerships

Do not use a partnership if	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Result requires a tight, inflexible schedule ■ Deviation from course is likely to be costly or unwise ■ Precise deliverables are important ■ USAID needs to be directly involved in oversight to achieve the result
Partnerships may be appropriate if the intended results include	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Institutional capacity strengthening ■ Transfer of technical skills, methods, or new approaches ■ Transfer of important principles and values—for example, civil society ■ Two-way transfer of information
Partnerships are likely to be effective if additional intended results involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ongoing intellectual relationships between organizations ■ Strengthening relationships between American and host-country entities ■ Establishing potential long-term (post-USAID) relations ■ Linking local organizations to a wider fabric of international connections ■ Mobilizing volunteers
If using partnerships, be prepared for some of the following potential challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Relatively high level of interorganizational instability ■ Long and cumbersome formative period frequently needed before progress is made in achieving program results ■ Shifting goals and objectives as the partnership matures ■ Less control by USAID to manage and direct the relationship toward achieving Agency goals ■ Difficulties associated with working through volunteers

Workshops Yield Lessons for Improving Performance

Good Strategic Planning Is Key

C DIE's performance measurement and evaluation division recently launched an effort to better integrate performance management with strategic planning. Working with 500 USAID staff and partners in 20 workshops, PME staff found that good strategic planning is essential for managing for results and is necessary for choosing appropriate indicators. Three specific lessons emerged:

STRATEGIC PLANNING MUST BE REALISTIC

By definition (in the 1995 and 2000 Automated Directives System), a strategic objective must be achievable. It is not a high-level aspiration but rather something that is actually doable. "Establish the rule of law in Resultsistan" can rarely be a strategic objective, since the operating unit cannot achieve the result with the funds and time available. Better to lower the bar to "ensure that Resultsistan judges have an acceptable knowledge of the

existing civil code"—a more reasonable objective.

Despite the reality-based definition, many Agency strategic objectives continue to be overly optimistic. We often believe that if we are to receive funding we need to overstate what we can accomplish. Unfortunately, what this does is set USAID, the mission, and the strategic objective team up for failure.

To set the right level for a strategic objective, ask the questions "What will be different as a result of these activities?" and "How will we know if the program has succeeded?" These questions 1) establish how ambitious the strategic objective should be and 2) provide the first indicator of success. If you cannot say what will be different as the result of what you're going to do and how you will objectively know you have succeeded, you may not have defined your strategic objective adequately. Then it's back to the drawing board.

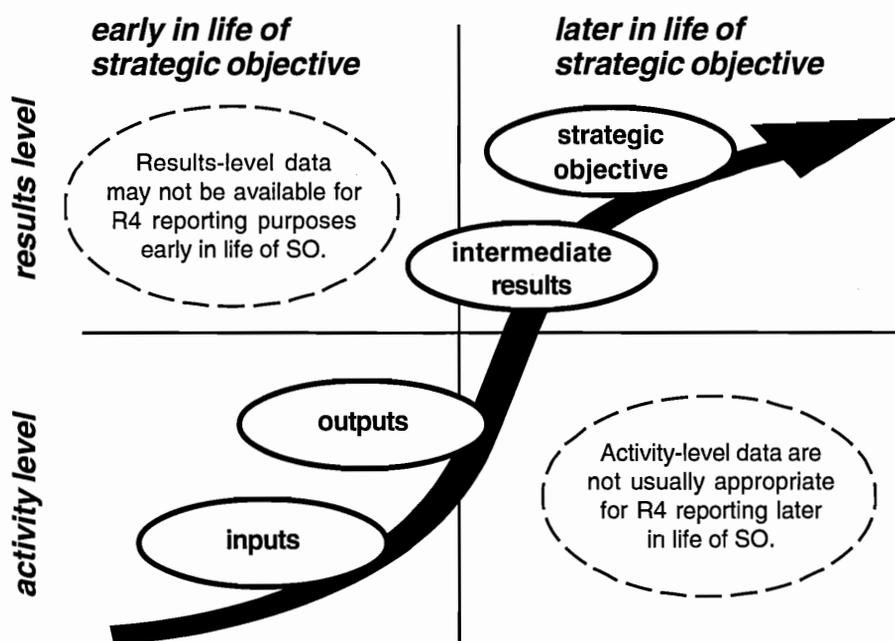
Often it is helpful to go back to the results framework—the graphical picture of how all the program pieces fit together—to help see whether all activities actually will reach the strategic objective you're trying to achieve. In principle, the results framework should stretch all the way from inputs to the strategic objective. When you document this, you help yourself and your team understand what you're trying to accomplish and how you're going to get there. Without this, performance monitoring or indicator development will be difficult or impossible.

This process is graphically shown in the accompanying figure. On the left, where a program starts, is a situation that is less desirable than the one on the right. Not enough children are being taught, for example, or microenterprise is languishing. The object of strategic planning is to develop a way to get from the undesired situation to the desired one. The results framework is your roadmap from the one to the other. Selecting indicators is the next step.

CHOOSE THE BEST INDICATOR FOR YOUR PROGRAM

Indicators are reference points that help you track progress toward your goals. No matter how highly recommended by experts, indicators that don't really apply to what you're doing should not be used. Indicator selection goes right back to the strategic-planning question "How will I know if my program has succeeded?" If you answer this question in an objective, verifiable way, you will have your main indicator. (Note that this permits qualitative as well as quantitative indicators.) The indicators you choose must measure your activity's success.

Reaching Results: The Strategic Process



Lessons

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Returning to the figure, we see that indicators could measure progress along the vertical axis, or numerical progress toward the goal, or along the horizontal axis, which represents the time dimension. This figure demonstrates that numerical progress may be slow both at the beginning, when the program is getting started, and at the end, when it is consolidating its gains. Both types of indicators—"milestones" that track program progress toward the goal and

"results" that show whether the objective is being reached—are needed. Earlier indicators may measure inputs and outputs; later ones start to measure intermediate and strategic objectives. Both types address the question "Is this activity on track to achieving its objective?" and should be used to make management decisions and reporting progress.

KEEP INDICATOR SETS SMALL

Indicators do not have to describe every aspect of the program. Too many

indicators don't help you manage, since large data sets get to be overwhelming and overly expensive. ADS guidance, based on long experience, is that there should be no more than four indicators per element in the results frameworks.

These three lessons—strategic planning should be realistic, indicators must be matched to a specific program, and indicator sets should be small—will help strategic objective teams achieve the goals they set and communicate their accomplishments to others.

—DAN BLUMHAGEN

A New Vision of Conflict Prevention?

Seeing the World's Problems as Interlinked Can Make Deterrence Easier, Say Policy Thinkers

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION is worth a pound of cure. That principle is becoming central to the thinking of the development community. As USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April, total NATO peacekeeping and humanitarian aid efforts in Bosnia have cost \$53 billion. "Surely it is better to prevent disasters," reasoned Natsios, "than to clean up the mess after it is too late." But how should the United States try to prevent such emergencies? And why is it in our best interest to do so?

At a conference 8 January in Washington, more than 80 experts gathered to put forth proposals on how and why the United States should work to prevent conflict overseas. Titled "The Role of Foreign Assistance in Conflict Prevention," the conference was cosponsored by USAID and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. It fleshed out ideas introduced at an Agency workshop from the previous June (see "How Can USAID Prevent Deadly Conflict?" in the July 2000 EVALUATION NEWS). From their proposals, a new vision of conflict prevention—and thus foreign policy—may have begun to take shape.

REEXAMINING BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

In defining the U.S. role in the world, we must start with our own national security needs and interests, say the authors of a paper summarizing the key findings at the conference. "Defining a Vision for U.S. National Security Needs and Foreign Policy Framework for Year 2020" (by Kate Semerad, Jane Holl Lute, Anita Sharma, and former USAID chief of staff Dick McCall) maintains that while interests are constantly shifting under different circumstances, there are enduring American needs upon which our interests should be based: a secure homeland, a robust economy, strong allies, and predictable foreign relations.

Most of the events and emerging trends of the past decade have been decidedly outside the sphere of predictable foreign relations. The end of the Cold War marked the end of an established order that had existed for 45 years. The resulting power vacuums, new economic conditions, and other factors allowed ethnic, religious, and nationalistic forces to thrive, leading to a rash of civil wars. That instability and conflict has forced us to reexamine assumptions that democ-

racy and the "magic" of the marketplace, by themselves, would be sufficient to lay the foundation for a less threatening world. U.S. foreign policy experts have come to realize that the existence of a national government within clearly defined borders does not always guarantee a nation's stability.

We must therefore, say the authors, accept that crisis and conflict will occur well into the foreseeable future and implement an appropriate foreign policy. Noting that future threats to the United States will be diverse and complex—environmental degradation, forced migration, terrorism, shortage of resources, and spread of infectious disease—they suggest that military threats in the traditional sense might not be our greatest concern.

WHAT ELSE IS NEEDED?

Conflict and instability in certain countries will bring some of those threats directly to American soil. Therefore, a central element of U.S. foreign policy should be to help countries remain or become resilient to instability and conflict. According to the authors of "Defining a

see Conflict Prevention, page 8

