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EVALUATION
of the
SOUTHEAST ASIA DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP
(SEADAG)
of
The Asia Society
New York
1970 - 1972

498-208

26 June 1972

Mr. Phillips Talbot
President
The Asia Society
112 East 64 Street
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Phillips:

Enclosed is the report of the ad hoc committee appointed by you to evaluate the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group (SEADAG). Documents drafted by committees almost inevitably are repetitious and ours is no exception. For this we apologize.

We did not extract and tabulate our recommendations. They range widely in significance and should be read in the context of the report. Moreover, by leaving them embedded in the report, perhaps we will capture more readers for our evaluation.

We received excellent cooperation from the staff of the SEADAG secretariat who facilitated our work in many ways. Despite the tight time constraint, many thoughtful responses to our mail questionnaires were provided by academic and governmental participants in SEADAG -- American and Asian. We urge that their replies be retained for their potential value in establishing "benchmarks" from which to assess changes in attitudes toward SEADAG and its activities in the future.

Please call me if you have questions about our evaluation. If needs be, the members of the Committee can meet with you and/or your Executive Committee to discuss our findings and recommendations.

Sincerely


Frank H. Golay
(for the Ad Hoc Committee)

June 26, 1972

Report of an Evaluation Committee appointed by the President of The Asia Society to examine the performance of the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group under an agreement between The Asia Society and the Agency for International Development covering the period October 1, 1970 to September 30, 1972.

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Origins and formative years of SEADAG

The Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group (SEADAG), founded in 1966, resulted from the initiative of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) which sought to establish an additional channel through which official American efforts to participate in overseas economic and social development could be supported by the expertise and research of academic scholars engaged in area and functional studies related to Southeast Asia. The Asia Society, founded in 1956 "to stimulate meaningful intellectual exchange across the Pacific, and to deepen American understanding of Asia and Asians", agreed, with the support of public funds provided by AID, to sponsor and administer the activities of SEADAG and created a Secretariat for this purpose.

The President of The Asia Society serves as Chairman of SEADAG and carries legal and executive responsibility for implementation of the AID-Asia Society contractual agreement. The day-to-day administration of SEADAG is the responsibility of the Executive Secretary. The Executive Committee which serves to advise the Chairman of SEADAG includes the chairmen of the nine regular professional panels of SEADAG, four members-at-large appointed by the Chairman, as well as the Chairman and Executive Secretary. In addition, designated AID officials are invited and some former panel chairmen may be invited to sit with the Executive Committee but do not vote.

SEADAG began to function in a series of plenary sessions to which American scholars working on Southeast Asia were invited to meet with officials of The Asia Society and AID to plan the activities of the new enterprise. This stage proved of relatively short duration and SEADAG settled down into a format of panel/seminars around which scholars and AID officials who shared interests in Southeast Asia studies and in development problems

could coalesce to explore opportunities to apply their expertise in identifying and investigating development problems.

Not surprisingly, SEADAG, which sought to innovate in a relatively unexplored area of academic-governmental cooperation, confronted complex problems and experienced frustrating vicissitudes in its early years. Various problems arose in the constraints--explicit and implicit--which were imposed on AID by the Congress. Existing legislation established limits to the use of AID funds for SEADAG purposes and the threat of congressional reaction was evident in the timidity with which AID officials responded to the innovative proposals of their academic colleagues. For some academic participants, this pattern behaviour served to confirm their suspicions of AID's purpose in bringing SEADAG into existence.

More important, the formative years of SEADAG were unpropitious because of the war in Vietnam and the growing disenchantment with U.S. policy shared widely in the academic world. Some scholars who participated in SEADAG during the first year dropped out because they decided that they were being co-opted into an institution which existed to rationalize and dignify American policy. Other academic scholars drifted away because of the lack of direction in the early plenary planning sessions of SEADAG. Still others were frustrated in their attempts to find a congenial "home" in the panel format. Undoubtedly, a number made the purely rational decision that the cost of SEADAG participation, in terms of foregone research and other activities, was excessive. In other cases, frustrations arose in the divergence between the expectations generated by SEADAG for individual scholars and the evolving role of the organization.

These and other diverse factors help to explain two distinguishing characteristics of SEADAG. First is the relative absence of ideological

controversy attending the activities of SEADAG and, second, has been the relative stability in the roster of American scholars active in the enterprise. To the outside world, SEADAG appears to be an "exclusive" organization. It was not intended to be so, but its history reveals an unplanned process of selection of participants in the seminars; in some, in individuals who found themselves in general agreement with U.S. policy in Southeast Asia but who hoped to influence developmental aspects of American policy, in others, in technicians dealing with narrowly focused problems, in others, in scholars attracted by a level of abstraction congenial to their interests in theory and conceptualization. Moreover, as SEADAG assimilated to the forum role it attracted a disproportionate share of peripatetic academicians.

Over the past two years, SEADAG has had no "membership" other than that of the Executive Committee. Panel chairmen, who are appointed by the President of The Asia Society, are given broad autonomy to decide the subject matter of meetings, to solicit the papers presented, and to select the participants. The particular interests of the chairman and his breadth of knowledge of people in the field, especially of younger scholars, tend to restrict the range of participants. This is not to fault the panel chairmen, however, as their voluntary activities on behalf of SEADAG represent a selfless and essential contribution to the effectiveness of the enterprise.

SEADAG as a forum

The history of SEADAG falls into two distinct periods defined by the initial contract dated, June 30, 1966, under which AID funds were transferred to The Asia Society to support the activities of SEADAG. A second contract was executed, October 1, 1970, and SEADAG has functioned under its terms since that time.

Under the initial contract, SEADAG was charged

"To bring about a closer partnership of interest in Southeast Asia economic, social, and institutional development among American and Asian scholars in universities and foundations having a professional subject interest in Southeast Asia and officials of AID and other departments and agencies of the U.S. Government responsible for giving effect to official U.S. interest in Southeast Asian development...."

Asia Society

The second contract between AID and The / which reaffirms and elaborates the original goal defined for SEADAG, specifies the current objectives of the enterprise to be:

"To define and clarify basic development issues as they relate to Southeast Asia.

"To provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experience among organizations and persons, both in and out of government, in Asia and the United States, who are engaged in or professionally concerned with development activities in Southeast Asia.

"To stimulate and promote research relevant to development processes and programs in Southeast Asia.... To assist and expand the research capability of both Asian and American institutions and scholars.

"To strengthen the capacity of institutions in Asian development studies by facilitating closer ties between American and Asian academic communities and encouraging a mutually beneficial flow of knowledge on Southeast Asian development."

To meet its obligation to serve as an intellectual frontier over which academic scholars interact with AID administrators and other practitioners of economic development in exploring development issues, SEADAG has concentrated its efforts in a series of panel/seminars. The panel/seminars fall into three categories, each with a distinctive character which serves to select the participants. First are the country-focused seminars within which the influence of the area specialists has remained strong. This type of panel has been extended to only two countries of the area and it has proved to be a difficult and only moderately successful framework within which to develop intellectual exchange concerned with development problems--

short- or long-run. A second type of panel/seminar is organized around a broad area of subject matter, comparable to an academic discipline such as Development Administration or Education and Human Resource Development. Such panels have proved attractive to scholars concerned with broad conceptual and theoretical issues, who identify with the field of International Studies. SEADAG panels of this type frequently deal with comparative aspects of development problems and, ^{therefore,} often are concerned with countries and areas of the world outside Southeast Asia. Finally, there are the panel/seminars which are problem oriented and relatively closely focused; for example, Mekong Development or Population. Such panels tend to attract participants with technical expertise and they deal with problems more directly related to the day-to-day challenges facing aid administrators.

By the beginning of 1968, panel/seminars with a specific area focus were functioning for Indonesia and Vietnam, as were disciplinary panels for Development Administration, Political Development, and Education and Human Resource Development. Problem-oriented seminars existed for Rural Development, Urban Development, Mekong Development, Population, and Regional Development. At that time, approximately 250 academic scholars, foundation officials, and AID staff members, exclusively American, had participated as panel members. As of mid-1972, the panel/seminar structure remains unchanged from that described above although a few ad hoc panels of limited duration have been created to explore specific problems.

As of the present time, approximately 900 individuals have participated in the panel/seminar activities of SEADAG. Non-Asian participants number about 570 including 135 officials from AID/Washington and field missions. Participation of Asians, scholars and officials engaged in the formulation and/or implementation of development policies, has expanded rapidly in recent

years. Such participants number 323.

Panel chairmen are appointed by the Chairman of SEADAG to serve for approximately one year during which the panel is expected to meet three times. Currently, it is the responsibility of the Executive Secretary to identify qualified scholars and explore their willingness to serve as panel chairmen. Previously, panel chairmen have tended to be selected from among the more active participants in a panel. Although the continuity of the latter selection process promised that successive seminars would build on the work of earlier meetings and thereby permit particular development issues to be studied in depth, this process tended to exclude new and diverse points of view which can serve to renew and redirect the intellectual interests of a panel.

We note with approval the policy evident over the past two years of recruiting panel chairmen with the requisite expertise and intellectual commitment to explore new and substantive development problems. The returns to this policy are evident, for example, in the plans of the Mekong Panel to examine problems of nutrition in the area and the study of transportation problems to which the Urban Development panel is turning. Implicit in this policy is a continual renewal of the "membership" in SEADAG as panel chairmen seek participants with new and diverse qualifications specified by the range of new topics studied by the panel/seminars.

From its founding, SEADAG has been concerned with expanding the participation of Asian counterparts of American scholars and development administrators. In recent years, and particularly as the number of panel/seminars meeting in Southeast Asia has increased, the range and quality of Asian participation has steadily improved. The returns to SEADAG and AID from increased Asian participation in meaningful dialogue of high quality are

unmistakable. We find no grounds for recommending a change in current practice with respect to Asian participation in SEADAG. We note, however, the high proportion of Asian participants who comment on the need to introduce more Asian policy makers into the panel/seminars.

There are two tangible products of the panel/seminars; reports of the seminars and contributed papers which, on a selective basis, may be published in the series of SEADAG Papers or, in diverse formats, as integrated collections of papers.

We find that the opportunity to disseminate effectively the findings emerging in the discussion within the panel/seminars has been neglected. Seminar reports typically are perfunctory and tedious with detail where they could comprise perceptive and significant distillations from the intellectual exchange. On a selective basis, seminar reports should receive a distribution comparable to that given SEADAG Papers.

Eighty-seven papers selected from among 415 papers prepared for panel/seminar meetings have been published as SEADAG Papers. During the first four years of SEADAG, 1966-70, approximately two-thirds of all panel papers were published as SEADAG Papers, whereas, over the past two years this ratio has declined to less than one-fifth. Additional papers prepared for panel/seminar meetings have been published as integrated collections, six of which have appeared beginning in 1968; three as issues of journals specializing on Asia, two as soft-cover volumes under the SEADAG imprint, and one as soft-cover book by a commercial publisher. We find that SEADAG papers have improved generally but are still more uneven than is desirable. The increased discrimination evident in the screening of panel/seminar papers for publication should maintain improvement in the overall quality of SEADAG publications. We consider that three of the collections of panel/seminar papers aggregate to significant and informative contributions to knowledge of development issues.

Respectable progress has been made in expanding the output of published

panel/seminar papers in recent years and the image of SEADAG has benefited from this effort. This progress opens up an additional degree of freedom, however, and we urge that prompt action be taken to raise the quality of SEADAG publications which can benefit from consistent standards of style and more rigorous editing. It is time for SEADAG to begin to use outside referees to appraise manuscripts and to use ad hoc editorial committees to assess collections of papers.

The success of SEADAG as a forum is critically dependent upon the panel chairman. On his shoulders falls a heavy burden. The extent of and effectiveness of AID input into the panel/seminars will reflect his initiative and energy in establishing and maintaining a productive relationship with the AID Action Officer assigned to his panel. The intellectual stimulus generated by his panel will depend upon the judgment he brings to the selection of the problem to be investigated, the papers he solicits, the participants he invites, and upon the contagious enthusiasm he can generate among the panel participants by his own knowledge and qualities of leadership. The flexibility of SEADAG in identifying and exploring new issues and its success in mobilizing and focusing new and diverse expertise on development problems depends, to a critical degree, upon the panel chairmen. We conclude that the performance of SEADAG as a forum has improved steadily in recent years and that much of the credit for this can be traced to the success with which able panel chairmen have been recruited. There have been panel chairmen and panel chairmen, but general improvement in the performance of this role is unmistakable.

If SEADAG is to continue and to increase its value to AID and to other beneficiaries, a number of changes need to be made to assist the panel chairman. First, there is need to increase the "lead time" in recruiting panel

chairmen, particularly those selected from outside the membership of existing panel/seminars. An incoming panel chairman not familiar with the forum activities of SEADAG, should have the opportunity to visit panel/seminar meetings and to meet with current panel chairmen.

Second, thought and effort need to be given to the relationship between the panel chairman and his counterpart Action Officer within AID. Newly selected panel chairmen, prior to taking over their panel, should be given travel funds and expenses to enable them to spend a few days at AID/Washington. These interviews and briefings should be scheduled to give the chairman needed knowledge of the organization of AID and the range of AID activities and interests impinging on the topic which he proposes to explore with his panel.

Third, SEADAG should be more realistic in compensating the panel chairman. An effective panel chairman makes a valuable contribution to the work of SEADAG, and he is motivated to do so by diverse incentives, material and psychic. Up to the present, judicious "ad hocery" has sufficed to deal with marginal pressures from panel chairmen for assistance to enable them to reserve the time and energy they must devote to their panels if they are to be effective. Diverse arrangements have been made for "research assistance", "secretarial assistance", "editorial fees" and perhaps other devices to provide some material rewards to the panel chairman. We urge that SEADAG examine carefully the need to establish a basic fee to be paid a panel chairman which will provide him an appropriate honorarium and, in addition, cover miscellaneous costs he inevitably incurs in his role as panel chairman, and which he absorbs because the time and inconvenience involved in documenting them for reimbursement are excessive relative to the amounts involved. There is opportunity in such a policy to maintain incentives designed to

improve the publications of panel/seminars, particularly the Reports summarizing the work of the seminar. Such a fee is likely to represent only a modest return for the time and energy demanded by SEADAG of an effective panel chairman.

Fourth, funds should be available to permit an incoming panel chairman travel to Asia to identify and recruit qualified Asians to participate in the work of his panel. Such a policy is desirable as the emphasis in SEADAG's forum activities shifts to problem-oriented panels chaired by technicians who frequently have limited experience in Southeast Asia. Such a policy also should result in increased participation of Asians formulating and implementing development policies.

Still another substantive question raised by our examination of SEADAG is that of the appropriate level of panel activity. We assess the current format as excessively rigid in its time dimension. For most panels, three seminar meetings a year are too many, given the fact that panel chairmen and members contributing papers volunteer their services on top of normal workloads as administrators and scholars. Better seminar papers, discussion and publications can result if the work of the average seminar is spread over a longer period. If the panel/seminars are "stretched-out", the present level of SEADAG activity will have to be spread over more panels. This alternative is feasible in the case of problem-oriented seminars where a choice of topics will select discrete rosters of qualified participants. If an additional panel is organized under the rubric of an existing panel category, one panel might "lie fallow" for a prolonged period while the second panel is meeting actively. Such a "fallow" period can be used to improve the quality of seminar papers and, moreover, it will permit more effective employment of the research grants program in support of panel/seminars.

The research program

Uncertainty and misinformation in the early years of SEADAG contributed to academic expectations for the direct grants research program which were generally exaggerated and which served to maintain tension between the academic world and SEADAG. Such expectations were widely shared by established area specialists who anticipated that the newly formed Southeast Asia Regional Council of the Association for Asian Studies would play an important role in organizing research on Southeast Asia, including that funded by SEADAG.

The research grants program has suffered rapid decline both in dollar amount and as a share of total SEADAG funding since the initial competition for awards in the spring of 1969. As a result, academic interest in the program has sagged, applications for grants have declined in number, and expectations generated by the program have become more realistic.

The initial competition for SEADAG research grants tenable during the academic year 1969-70 resulted in the ^{initial} allocation of \$488,000 to fund 24 projects. Sixteen proposals submitted by active participants in SEADAG panels received grants totaling \$397,000, an average of \$24,600 per project. Eight proposals submitted by non-participants received total funding of \$91,000, an average of \$11,400.

Projects funded for academic year 1970-71 numbered sixteen of which ten submitted by active participants in SEADAG panels received \$226,500, an average of \$22,650 per proposal. Six projects submitted by non-participants received grants totaling \$85,500, for an average of \$14,250. Grants awarded for 1971-72 totaled \$312,000.

In the spring of 1971, grants totaling \$102,250 funding nine proposals for research during 1971-72 were awarded by SEADAG. Seven projects submitted by active participants in panels received grants totaling \$77,600,

an average of \$11,100 per proposal. The remaining projects submitted by non-participants received grants averaging \$12,325 for a total of \$24,650.

In May of 1972, ten grants for total funding of \$108,900 were announced by SEADAG. Four proposals from active participants in panels were awarded \$50,000 and six proposals from non-participants received \$58,900. This latest competition was distinctive for three awards to Asians, two of whom were faculty members at universities in the area, and for the high proportion of total funding going to non-participants.

The proportion of grant funds allocated to non-participants has increased rapidly until for 1972-73 their proportion exceed that of active participants. This is a welcome development as the more liberal levels at which research proposals submitted by panel participants were funded and the disproportionate share of available funds diverted to them in the early years of the research grants program sustained resentment of SEADAG as an enterprise tightly held by "insiders".

Controversy over the role of embassy and AID mission officials in screening research proposals persisted throughout the period of the initial SEADAG contract. We find that SEADAG administrators have been sensitive to this issue and have been forceful in negotiating enlarged SEADAG autonomy in screening proposals. Presently, residual control of government agencies over the selection of research proposals is limited to ambassadorial veto ^{over field research} power, where host country political sensitivity is assessed as sufficiently volatile that United States foreign policy objectives are likely to be adversely affected if the proposed investigation is undertaken. The Committee finds this reservation understandable and inescapable for a government-funded research program. We also find that AID/Washington is sensitive to the tensions maintained by this residual veto power and applies leverage

to ensure that rejections of research proposals are kept to a minimum. We find that although controversy continues over this issue, it is subsiding and is tolerable.

It is too early to survey the productivity of the research grants program with confidence. The final products of a majority of the grant awards through 1970 have not yet materialized. The limited results of the program available to the Committee include several articles and monographs of high quality which present results of definite value to AID policy makers. Unfortunately this appears to be more true of the work of American scholars than of their Asian counterparts. Some of this difference may be inevitable, and can be considered a cost of bringing Asian scholars more prominently into SEADAG activities.

The principal remaining concern over the research program found by the Evaluation Committee is that for focus. Should the research subjects range over the spectrum of development problems? Or, should they be focused quite specifically on problems with which panels are dealing? Should panels be involved in stimulating research projects related to their particular concerns? Should panels "control" research funds available to SEADAG?

Examination of the research proposals receiving grants confirms the impression shared by the Committee members that the direct-grants program has not been as successful as it needs to be in supporting the work of the panel/seminars.

A review of current grant program confirms that no central focus exists narrower than the range of issues embraced by the field of development. Indeed, the general impression is one of diffused concerns which do not add up to a concerted impact which would permit SEADAG to say that it made a major contribution toward understanding or solving any particular problem.

The policy question seems to remain: Should the research "zero in" on a limited number of problems with the view of trying to achieve breakthrough, or should it continue to support a broad band of interests and stimulate diverse participation and research products?

The SEADAG research program, currently funded at the level of about \$100,000 annually (net of administrative costs) is a modest program of obvious interest and value to academic scholars. It competes with and supplements a range of research grant programs to which predoctoral and postdoctoral scholars can turn, including Fulbright-Hays, NDEA Title IV, NDEA Title VI, Foreign Area Fellowships, Guggenheim Foundation, Ford Foundation (Bangkok), Agricultural Development Council, and so forth. Every increment of research funding is welcomed by the academic world. On the other hand, the contribution of SEADAG to the total funding available for research on Southeast Asia and on development problems is a minor one.

The evolution of the research program to one of relatively small grants (averaging \$10-\$12,000 for academic year 1972-73) supplementing sabbatic leave salary and other sources of partial research support is logical and efficient. In the process of establishing the current dimensions and policies of the research program, the image of SEADAG as a cornucopia, which was widely held in academic circles, suffered deflation with no evident cost in terms of the overall quality of academic participation.

The Evaluation Committee recommends that SEADAG policy vis-a-vis the research program be re-examined and that appropriate steps be taken to integrate the research program with the work of the panel/seminars. Redirecting the research program to more effectively support the panel seminars will be facilitated if, as the Evaluation Committee has recommended, panel chairmen are recruited well in advance of the active period of their panels and the

period over which panels meet is lengthened. It is quite possible that more and better research can be produced if the direct-grants program is collapsed and the funds are used to contract research and/or seminar papers which support the work of the panel/seminars.

SEADAG, The Asia Society, AID and Academia

The opportunity to integrate the activities of the Society with the academic world was a significant consideration when The Asia Society made the decision--which was not riskless--to serve as the broker between AID and the scholarly world. After six years the relationship has settled into a mutually rewarding collaboration between the contracting principals. As SEADAG has acquired credibility in its role as forum and misinformation and uncertainty over SEADAG's research program have been eliminated, the risks to The Asia Society of its broker role have diminished to slight proportions. The administrative and logistical burdens assumed by the Society are substantial, but these are fully offset by the budgetary allocations for administration and the overhead built into the Society's contract with AID.

Officials of The Asia Society, AID administrators, and individual scholars and aid practitioners, American and Asian, come together in SEADAG to participate in an intellectual exchange which promises a return of value to each individual. At another level, The Asia Society through SEADAG is serving as a bridge between the academic world and AID and the "image" held by academia of SEADAG becomes a measure of the return to the principals from their collaboration. The specification of a reliable composite academic image of SEADAG did not seriously divert the Evaluation Committee. Awareness of SEADAG in the academic world is confined essentially to participants in SEADAG, to their colleagues in disciplines concerned with developmental

issues, and to scholars participating in, or trained in area studies programs dealing with Southeast Asia.

When AID officials, seeking to respond to the recommendations of the Gardner Report on A.I.D. and the Universities, sought academic contacts to explore the possibilities for mutually rewarding intellectual exchange, they turned initially to area studies programs. Their reception was sufficiently encouraging that, with the assistance of The Asia Society, SEADAG was launched with preponderant participation by area studies types. Over time, however, the participation of such scholars has declined relative to that of other categories of panel members. The reasons for this change are diverse and are dominated by those factors influencing individual attitudes and behaviour identified in the introductory section above.

Area studies programs are engaged primarily in training graduate students for field research and for careers of scholarship and teaching in higher education. Although much of the research on Southeast Asia is produced under the auspices of the area studies programs, both faculty members and students in programs tend to be individual scholars pursuing congenial research interests. Although they are strongly represented in the social sciences, they frequently are little attracted by the challenge to apply their expertise to those operational problems which are the concern of AID. Admittedly, the distinction promptly becomes fuzzy, but it is meaningful to categorize their research interests as being disproportionately in "pure" research rather than applied research. These factors, internal to the organization and functions of area studies, serve to narrow the universe of area studies scholars who are likely to be attracted to SEADAG.

Southeast Asia centers, as such, overlap the activities of SEADAG only to a minor extent. Some faculty members find the activities of SEADAG

congenial and they participate--other faculty members do not, and for diverse reasons.

The Evaluation Committee attempted to generate information pertinent to concerns of the Committee by mailing a questionnaire to all past and present participants in SEADAG panel/seminars. Among other questions, the respondents were asked: "What summary statement, do you feel, accurately summarizes the reactions of your academic colleagues to your participation in SEADAG?" At the time of the late June deadline imposed for submission of our report, we had received some 125 returns to this question, many of which were serious and thoughtful. A majority of the answers support the impression that initial academic suspicion of SEADAG has subsided to a significant degree. A high proportion of the respondents commented to the effect that their participation in SEADAG is accepted and increasingly approved by their colleagues.

The objective record of SEADAG activities support the following conclusions: The subjects around which panels are organized are of importance to a number of American and Asian scholars. A number of recognized scholars have responded to the challenge to serve as panel chairmen. Panel chairmen have been able to fill panel rosters with able scholars and most participating scholars welcome and value their participation.

With respect to AID/Academic relations, these developments suggest that through SEADAG, AID is able to share major substantive and developmental concerns with an influential community of academic scholars and a number of recognized scholars find SEADAG an attractive forum for inquiry and exchange. The net effect of SEADAG, therefore, has been to improve relations between AID and participating scholars.

With regard to the impact of SEADAG on AID/Academic relations beyond the community of participating scholars, the impact is of slight intensity

and its direction will be assessed differently by different individuals. Given the circumstances in which SFADAG emerged--the War in Vietnam and mounting uneasiness over U.S. foreign policy--the survival of SEADAG as a meeting ground for scholars and AID officials might be assessed as a surprising accomplishment. We are convinced, however, that SEADAG has done more than survive. It has steadily enlarged its autonomy vis-a-vis AID, it has enlisted the support of able scholars as panel chairmen, it has initiated publications and research programs which are improving, and it has achieved credibility as a forum where AID officials and scholars--American and Asian--conduct an exchange which is frequently sharp, and usually serious and meaningful.

SEADAG and other development institutions

On the basis of past experience and a series of conversations with various individuals in foundations, private development assistance and research institutions, and international aid-giving organizations, we conclude that although some operating organizations recognize the work of SEADAG and benefit from it, there are significant gaps in knowledge of SEADAG and its work on the part of responsible individuals who could benefit from such knowledge. We find, moreover, a range of organizations that should be receiving SEADAG publications and research results, but do not. For example, although the Special Projects Division of the IBRD has used the work of SEADAG's Mekong Development panel and IBRD officials felt positive about the work, the Economic Adviser to the East Asia Department (which includes Southeast Asia), has little knowledge of SEADAG and its activities; nor does the Economic Adviser to the President of the IBRD. In the IMF, a senior officer of the Asia Department knew nothing of SEADAG beyond its existence. The officer in the Rockefeller Foundation dealing specifically with that organization's economic programs in the region,

saw no SEADAG papers. In the Asian Development Bank there is little knowledge of SEADAG's work, although some staff members have participated in panel/seminars. Officials consulted at UNDP Asia Department had little knowledge of either SEADAG or its work. In a leading university-affiliated development organization there was surprisingly little knowledge of SEADAG's work.

To the extent that gaps in knowledge of SEADAG and its work exist for individuals and organizations that should be informed, this may reflect such factors as inadequacies in the distribution of information within institutions or the frustrating experiences of participants in SEADAG. Such gaps may also arise from weakness in SEADAG procedures for distributing announcements, published papers and panel reports. In any case, SEADAG should open regular channels of exchange to ensure that responsible officers of major institutions --operational and research--engaged in aid activities receive copies of panel/seminar reports and research summaries. To do so will make improvement in the quality of these SEADAG products more urgent.

To some extent SEADAG does duplicate parts of programs of the Ford Foundation and the Agricultural Development Council (ADC). Its research program undoubtedly attracts proposals which could be adapted to the requirements of a range of research competitions. Similar comments might be made concerning the relationships between the work of SEADAG and other non-U.S. government institutions--private and international. We conclude, however, that SEADAG provides a direct channel between scholars and the aid-giving process of the U.S. government that otherwise would be lacking. In its work it carries out a longer-term and broader level of analysis than more directly operational organizations in the international field can do. This work can be of unique importance in identifying future areas of activity for operating agencies.

SEADAG and AID: Communication and cooperation

The initiative of AID in establishing SEADAG promised potential gains and involved obvious risks. The relationship of AID with Congress established practical constraints on the speed with which AID could vest SEADAG with autonomy, in particular, the speed with which the research component could be established and AID control dismantled. The pace at which SEADAG has evolved to its present role reflects the mutual confidence of AID and The Asia Society officials, as well as pressures internal to the SEADAG membership and within the academic community more widely, which helped to ensure steady transfer of control over SEADAG to The Asia Society.

SEADAG is one among several instruments for organizing intellectual exchange involving AID staff, academic scholars and officials from less developed countries. Workshops supported by AID funds are organized by the Agricultural Development Council on agricultural policy, the National Science Foundation on population policy, and the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering on science and technology issues. In addition, there are seminars, workshops, reviews and consultations associated with university institutional 211(d) grants, central research contracts, and the efforts of AID offices to develop policies and programs to help solve development problems.

AID participants in SEADAG expect some excellence, some mediocrity, and a basic core of competence from their academic colleagues in the panel/seminars. In general, SEADAG is looked to as a source of intellectual stimulation, not as a vehicle for problem solving. A significant proportion of AID officials reported that they always benefited intellectually from panel sessions. Many expressed appreciation for the interchange with academic colleagues in the relaxed environment of extended SEADAG panel/seminar sessions. A number complained, however, that the panels tend to become inbred and that

through SEADAG they meet the same academicians they meet in other development assistance forums. Many characterized SEADAG panels as of average to better-than-average quality when contrasted to other AID/academic discussion forums. SEADAG discussion papers, in general, were not assessed by AID participants as of publishable quality; panel dialogue more often than not, was rated highly.

These balanced assessments contrast with the narrower view expressed by almost all AID officials that SEADAG must have some kind of impact on AID's policies and projects or it is not serving a useful purpose. When asked if SEADAG has had such an impact", the answers of AID officers reveal two basic concepts of the nature of the impact expected of SEADAG. Many have responded in terms of the "relevance" of SEADAG activities to AID's areas of interest. Others have responded in terms of objective relationships between SEADAG research and seminars with ongoing or prospective AID projects.

Although it is difficult to quantify the responses of AID officials when queried about SEADAG's impact, in general, Washington staff officers give higher marks to SEADAG for relevance than do officers in field missions, but there are a number of important exceptions. Officials in AID/Washington are more likely to be interested in the intellectual exchange of the panel/seminars which concerns their countries or their disciplines and will have a more inclusive concept of AID's interests. Field officials, on the other hand, tend to be concerned--sometime exclusively--with the planning or implementation of specific projects. Moreover, Washington officials maintain closer touch with SEADAG and its panel chairmen and agendas for SEADAG seminars are frequently planned with a substantial input reflecting AID/Washington's interests.

It is possible to cite a variety of instances where SEADAG influenced

AID projects and programs. Although SEADAG has no mandate to review or propose projects, it has occasionally performed such a role. AID officers cite cases of panel/seminars to which qualified outside experts have been invited to review project proposals, as well as to review projects and programs well advanced in the planning stage. Panel/seminars are also cited where AID has asked SEADAG to consider a series of more general questions which seemed important to AID prior to developing a program.

The Mekong Development panel provides good examples of the types of impact SEADAG can exert on AID. A recent panel/seminar on fisheries reviewed a rather fully developed project proposal drafted by representatives of AID and the Mekong Committee. As a result of the panel/seminar, the project was modified and, in addition, one of the panel participants was asked to take part in the project. Also cited are two panel/seminars on resettlement to which can be traced a major study to be carried out by AID and non-U.S. donors with substantial riparian and Mekong Committee support.

AID's experience with SEADAG has included a series of evaluations which, in general, have been severely critical of the contribution of SEADAG to the work of AID. The Evaluation Committee had access to five AID evaluations of SEADAG; that of March 22, 1971, by Consultant J. Cudd Brown on the Regional Development Panel, a second by Brown, dated April 19, 1971, on the Rural Development panel, that of September 30, 1971, by Christina A. Schoux, Office of Regional Development, on the Development Administration Panel, and the broader SEADAG evaluations, one by Robert R. Johnson, EA/TECH, AID, of April 20, 1969, and a second, of October 29, 1971, A.I.D. Evaluation of SEADAG, Phase I, a review of SEADAG administrative practices prepared by AID Office of Regional Development. Two critical themes are common to the internal evaluations from AID. First is concern for AID participation, which is faulted as deficient quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Also emphasized is the

lack of AID relevance of particular panel/seminars.

Our investigation confirms that AID participation in SEADAG has not been commensurate with the potential benefits to be derived from such participation. With few exceptions, the turnover of AID participants has been relatively rapid and their participation, both in the preparation of seminar papers and the give-and-take of the panels, has generally been minor as compared to the contributions of others. Although we appreciate the organized efforts within AID to develop lines of communication and procedures to make better use of the non-governmental resources mobilized in the panel/seminars, we are equally impressed by the widespread negativism evident in the comments of AID officials.

The critically important individual in determining the effectiveness of AID participation is the Action Officer. An Action Officer is recruited for each panel from among the branches and divisions of AID/Washington, with functional responsibilities which relate directly to the topic to be taken up by the panel. He is responsible for organizing AID's input into the planning of the work of the panel, he identifies and recruits AID officials to participate in the panel meetings, and he is the channel for liaison between the panel chairman and AID officials.

Just as in the case of the panel chairmen, there are Action Officers and Action Officers. Some are enthusiastic and effective in establishing a fruitful working relationship with their panel chairmen. Others are enthusiastic but are frustrated in their efforts to make effective use of SEADAG. Some are passive with respect to their SEADAG responsibilities and they may or may not be paired with a panel chairman of similar temperament. The relationship between the panel chairman and the Action Officer is a personal one and it may prove stable or volatile, gratifying or abrasive.

The Action Officer absorbs responsibilities vis-a-vis SEADAG on top of

his other duties. The material rewards are minor and uncertain and limitations of funding and work responsibilities may not permit him to attend panel/seminars. The position carries little prestige among his peers and, at best, contributes marginally to his advancement within AID. We urge that AID take measures to ensure that (a) Action Officers participate in all seminars held by their panels, (b) the work of Action Officers with SEADAG is recognized in evaluating their overall performance, and (c) SEADAG seminar reports and research studies reach the appropriate policy level officers for the area.

For the most part, the problems of the Action Officer are internal to AID/Washington. There are, however, opportunities open to SEADAG to assist the Action Officer in performing his role. A number of steps can be taken to see that each panel chairman is aware of his responsibility to increase the effectiveness of his panel through his relationship with the Action Officer. An obvious contribution can be made by ensuring that the Panel Chairman spends at least two days in AID/Washington during the planning of the activities of his panel and that the Office of Regional Development is alerted to his need to meet AID/Washington officials responsible for plans and operations related to the proposed topic of the seminar.

The SEADAG Secretariat

We find widespread agreement that the effectiveness of the SEADAG Secretariat has improved substantially over recent years. We note with approval the contribution being made by the Executive Secretary in broadening the participation base of SEADAG and in introducing new exciting developmental issues to which the panel/seminars are turning. The energy and good judgment evident in the recruitment of panel/chairmen have contributed materially to the effectiveness of SEADAG as a forum.

The Executive Secretary's role in maintaining and upgrading the effectiveness of SEADAG is critically important. He initiates the relationship between the panel chairman and the AID Action Officer and must be alert to mediate differences and resolve problems that arise in that relationship. He is responsible to consult with AID officials, particularly the panel Action Officer involved, in selecting a panel chairman. Similarly, he must encourage and facilitate AID participation in the planning of the activities of panels. If an Action Officer feels that he has not participated in a meaningful way in the selection of a new panel chairman or that the new chairman, after planning sessions and discussions involving the Action Officer, does not move to organize panel/seminars responsive to AID's interests, the priority assigned by the Action Officer to his SEADAG responsibilities inevitably slumps.

Of equal importance is the Executive Secretary's responsibility to tend the relationship of the Secretariat to the panel chairmen, to help the latter to expand their knowledge of AID's activities and personnel and to communicate to them awareness of AID's interests.

Improvement of the effectiveness of SEADAG in performing its principal roles has been dependent to a critical degree upon steady enlargement of its autonomy vis-a-vis AID. The success with which the leadership of SEADAG has met this challenge is unmistakable. Our investigation, however, revealed some concern that excessive SEADAG sensitivity for its autonomy may curtail AID input into the selection of panel chairmen and the choice of topics to be investigated by panel/seminars with adverse consequences for SEADAG.

The credibility of this subjective and impressionistic evaluation of SEADAG would have benefited from information on SEADAG expenditures organized into categories of obvious value in assessing the cost-effectiveness of SEADAG activities. For example, we would have found useful data on (a) the annual

direct cost of panel/seminars broken down into travel, maintenance of participants, and residual direct costs; (b) the indirect cost per year of panel/seminars, broken down into honoraria for papers, support for panel chairmen, costs of reproducing and distributing panel documents, cost of planning meetings, and the imputed portion of SEADAG administrative outlays supporting the panel seminars; (c) the annual expenditures on SEADAG publications, broken down into publication costs, distribution costs, and imputed administration costs; (d) expenditures on the research program, broken down into grants, and imputed administration costs; (e) unimputed administration costs; and (f) overhead. We hasten to add, that we received excellent cooperation from the Secretariat and we are confident that the resources of the Secretariat would have been applied to producing the above-listed information on expenditures if we had asked for it. On the other hand, to extract this information from the present accounting categories would be a formidable task. The value of data on expenditures for monitoring the efficiency of SEADAG is self-evident; however, and the next evaluation committee may insist on having such information for its purposes.

Insofar as the available SEADAG budgets are a reliable guide to actual expenditures, the two years of the present SEADAG contract, ending September 30, 1972, should see total administrative outlays (salaries, benefits, supplies, materials, meetings of Executive Committee, communications, administrative travel, and overhead) of some \$600,000 or four-ninths of budgeted expenditures. Allocations for research grants should total about \$200,000 and the remaining expenditures, some \$500,000 will directly and indirectly support the activities of the panel/seminars, including costs of meetings, publications, communications, and other outlays for ancillary support.

SEADAG is presently funded at a level which adequately supports the range

of activities undertaken. Costs of administration appear to be in line with comparable programs and the allocation for overhead is not out of line when compared with government practice in contracting with academic institutions.

SEADAG and economic development

The Evaluation Committee is charged to answer the questions: What has been and what could be the contribution of SEADAG to development in Southeast Asia? We left these questions to the last because our report has been concerned throughout with facets of their answers.

To produce the information necessary to a reliable assessment of the actual and potential "contribution of SEADAG to development in Southeast Asia" would require time, manpower and funds which were not at the disposal of the Evaluation Committee. The fragmentary information available in the files of SEADAG and the limited additional information which the Committee was able to generate by hurried mail surveys aggregates to a sample of information which can be used to support diverse assessments of SEADAG's "contribution", the reliability of none of which is adequately supported.

The Committee discovered a number of instances in which panel/seminars constructively influenced the activities and policies of AID. Similarly, we have learned of seminar papers and research projects which have been singled out by AID officials as contributing significantly to the planning and implementation of specific AID programs. Counter-balancing the information available to the Committee which might be used to construct a case to support the assessment that SEADAG's support of AID has been positive and significant, are the critical assessments of SEADAG made by AID officials and non-government participants in various panel/seminars.

The principal role to which SEADAG has assimilated, that of a forum for

intellectual exchange focused on development issues, fills a "gap" but no member of the Committee, at this time, would attribute major contributions to knowledge of development to SEADAG's forum activities. We acknowledge, however, that SEADAG performs a relatively unique and valuable function by maintaining a direct link between scholars and government officials--American and Asian.

It would be pretentious at this time to try to assess the impact of SEADAG's research grant program on the corpus of development literature. The results of research supported by SEADAG funds are beginning to appear, some in journals of excellent quality, but only a small proportion of the proposals funded by SEADAG has resulted in publications.

Although we find that SEADAG Papers are improving, they remain uneven and, for the most part, are preliminary and/or derivative and their impact on the lively and growing body of development literature has been very modest. Panel Reports are potentially a valuable product of SEADAG's forum activities, but presently they are of little value to scholars and aid practitioners.

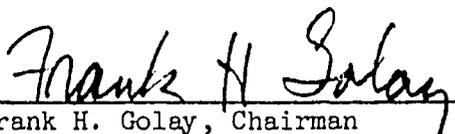
At present the objectives, capabilities, the actual roles, and the expectations held for SEADAG are internally consistent. The contribution of SEADAG to economic development in Southeast Asia is positive and modest. The level of funding of SEADAG is modest as befits the role assigned to SEADAG in the successive contract negotiated by AID and The Asia Society. The enterprise is highly dependent upon the initiative and voluntary contributions of scholars who are motivated diversely and respond to various incentives. The effectiveness with which SEADAG performs its role as a forum is generally high and improving, and only to a minor degree is it competitive with any alternative institution.

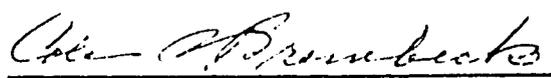
The second charge to the Evaluation Committee is to identify "what could

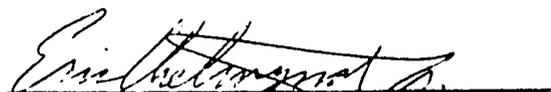
be" the contribution of SEADAG to development in Southeast Asia. In terms of the present level of funding, SEADAG is commendably productive in performing its role as a forum. An alternative strategy might be to concentrate each year all of the available funding in support of an attack in depth upon a single developmental issue. Such a strategy, with good judgment and luck, might result in a significant contribution to development in Southeast Asia. But, it would be at the cost of other objectives presently assigned to SEADAG. Alternatively, SEADAG's funds might be allocated wholly to support research on development. The Committee examined this question and concluded that this strategy does not promise to enhance significantly SEADAG's potential contribution to development and the elimination of SEADAG as a forum would be a significant loss. Moreover, such a strategy would have to be evaluated in terms of a wide range of research institutions and research programs, many well-established and with tested productivity.

Little point is served in speculating about alternative strategies for SEADAG. SEADAG has found a niche. It fills a unique role which only marginally overlaps the activities of other institutions. AID is the consumer of SEADAG's services and AID appears to want more dialogue with the academic world. SEADAG provides a forum for such dialogue; more dialogue than AID, at present, is prepared to take advantage of.

We are agreed that the several findings which comprise our evaluation of SEADAG aggregate to a strongly positive case for continuing the enterprise. AID receives good value for its money. We urge that SEADAG be refunded.


 Frank H. Golay, Chairman


 Cole S. Brembeck


 Eric Chetwynd


 Kenneth M. Rabin


 George Rosen