



**BIFAD**

Board for International Food and Agricultural Development

OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 1

# **Tomorrow's Development Professionals: Where Will the Future Come From?**



December 1980

Agency for International Development  
Washington, D.C. 20523



BOARD FOR INTERNATIONAL FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT  
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

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**TOMORROW'S DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:  
WHERE WILL THE FUTURE COME FROM?**

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**This speech was originally presented to the American Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meeting held on July 28, 1980. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the BIFAD, IDCA, or AID.**

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TOMORROW'S DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

WHERE WILL THE FUTURE COME FROM?

Taking part in this year's meeting of the American Agricultural Economics Association gives me a special pleasure. Part of it is bound up with returning to the Midwest, a part of the country my family and I came to love during the eight years we spent at Michigan State University. Another part of the pleasure comes from the nature of the program: defining an agenda for the 1980s for our profession. Most important, however, is the simple delight I cannot help feeling at seeing so many familiar faces, so many friends and professional colleagues from the past and present alike.

There is Ted Schultz, of course, under whom I studied and for whom I had the immense privilege of working when I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago. There are also Harold Riley, Glenn Johnson, Jim Bonnen, and a strong contingent of MSU Spartans. If I look closely, I think I might even see a straggler or two from the State University of New York.

I. International Agriculturists: A Vanishing Breed?

As I said before, seeing all these familiar faces gives me a wonderful feeling of warmth and friendship. I have known so many

of you, either directly or through your work, for many years. And yet that in itself gives me a slight feeling of disquiet.

It gives me a feeling of disquiet because I wonder if there ought not to be more of you whom I do not know. Should there not be more unfamiliar faces, more of you I should have met or heard of only recently -- perhaps not at all?

In short, I feel uneasy because I have recently begun to wonder whether the field of international agricultural development is experiencing an odd variation on the old quip by Satchel Page. Page is famous for advising people not to look over their shoulder because someone might be gaining on them. What worries me these days is that when I look over my shoulder, no one or too few appear to be at my heels.

The fact of the matter is that the number of U.S. agriculturists who are interested in international development has been declining alarmingly. On the one hand, mid-career professionals have moved out of the area into domestic agricultural programs. On the other, relatively few younger professionals are entering or even considering the field to begin with.

As everyone in this room knows quite well, overseas technical assistance and international agricultural development came

into their own following World War II. That was the era of the pioneers, the giants of the field: Ted Schultz, Frosty Hill, Art Mosher, Glenn Johnson, Larry Witt, Ken Parsons, and Earl Heady. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, my own generation came along: Vern Ruttan, Wally Falcon, Dave Hopper, Carl Eicher, Woods Thomas, and John Mellor. We had the great good fortune to study and serve our apprenticeships with the ground-breakers at a time when international development and overseas technical assistance were the beneficiaries of considerable national largesse.

But, in the next generation things start looking thin. Glance at the lists of conference participants and at the rosters of speakers at annual meetings -- study the tables of contents of the professional journals. Again and again, you will note the same disturbing trend. Those who are publishing their articles, who are discussing their research, who are joining overseas task forces, tend to be the same people you would have found doing these things fifteen years ago -- perhaps even twenty-five years ago.

Now, I do not intend to suggest that there are literally no young professionals coming along. They are there, in many cases, conducting significant research, running important

projects, making needed and sustained contributions both to the economies of host nations and to the state-of-the-art for international agricultural development. Indeed, there are enough of them that, for a long time, I was unsure whether my concerns were well-founded. I might have been imagining a shortage that did not really exist.

Recently, however, the trend has been solidly documented by research. I want to outline very briefly the nature of the problem, then discuss what I see as its causes and suggest some very tentative steps toward improving the situation.

Recently, the AAFA itself sponsored a study under the guidance of Darrell Fienup and Harold Riley. The study report has just been published under the title: Training Agricultural Economists for Work in International Development. Before going on, I want to thank the authors for providing me with an advance copy, and I want also to note that Drs. Fienup and Riley have copies available for those who would like to examine them in detail.

The AAFA study looked at the entire question of professional development in agricultural economics. It found that, while demand for U.S. graduate training in agricultural

economics by LDC students has increased throughout the 1970s, U.S. support for agricultural economists interested in international development and overseas assistance has decreased. As a result, young professionals interested in and trained for international agricultural development have had to leave the field in large numbers for other kinds of projects or not enter at all. Let me quote from the report: The responses from a 1979 mail survey of 108 U.S. agricultural economists who obtained their Ph.D.s between 1968 and 1977 and who at the time . . . had major career interests in international development revealed that 40 percent no longer work in development. Most of these individuals are employed by universities . . . The pool of young U.S. professional agricultural economists with international development skills does not appear to be large relative to potential needs (Fienup and Riley, 1980, 86).

In May, J.F. Metz, whom many of you know as Director of International Agriculture at the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University, testified on the problem before a House Appropriations Subcommittee for Foreign Operations. According to Metz, 10 years ago, more than 50 percent of the faculty in Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences had experience in developing countries. Today, the figure is less than 30 percent (Fahs, 1980, 10).

When I began preparing for this evening's talk, I was curious enough about this problem to do a little research on my own. First, let me stress that I would be less than eager to defend my methodology, which was not exactly rigorous. However, it seemed to me that what was called for was not so much statistical elegance as just a first approximation of evidence. Accordingly, I asked my staff to contact 15 agricultural economics departments in major U.S. universities with very strong international program traditions. (I will resist listing the institutions by name lest my speech be ended at this point by the cries of outrage from those departments excluded.) In each department, my staff asked the following questions: first, how many faculty do you maintain at the ranks of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, and instructor? Second, how many faculty at each level have substantial interest, experience, and/or expertise in overseas technical assistance and international agricultural development? We also asked departmental representatives how many graduate assistants were assigned the department, and how many of these had elected doctoral programs with significant emphasis on overseas technical assistance and international agricultural development.

The results were predictable but still dramatic. Overall, these 15 departments averaged 40 percent of full professors with international interests or experience. At the associate

and assistant professor level, there was an abrupt drop to about 21 percent -- a decline of almost exactly one-half. The instructor ranks declined a bit lower still, to an average of 18 percent with international expertise and experience.

Now, I interpret this as at least a provisional confirmation of the thesis that international agricultural development is not attracting the young agricultural economists coming out of U.S. colleges and universities. One could argue that tenured younger faculty tend to avoid international work which is likely to go unrecognized or even be treated negatively by a tenure review committee. Also, it is true that age and academic rank are not precisely correlated, but the connection is reasonably close. Despite these caveats, what was most striking is that this overall decline, whether under or over-stated, has taken place at the institutions where international involvement since World War II has been strongest. If I had chosen a more representative institutional sample, the decrease might have been even more visible.

## II. Causes of Decline

Well, where does the trouble lie? Is it a question of lowered demand by the nations who had previously needed U.S. development assistance so desperately?

Hardly. As Fienup and Riley point out in the AAEA study I have already cited, the demand for agricultural economists abroad continues to outpace supply. In nine LDC countries, for example, employers indicated growing needs for B.S. - and M.S.-level specialists to staff government ministries, credit institutions, and marketing agencies. Ph.D.s were sought in host-country universities with existing or beginning graduate teaching and research programs, as well as in government planning units and research institutes (Fienup and Riley, 1980, 54).

Even as more and more LDC students seek training in U.S. colleges and universities we, ironically, have fewer and fewer faculty with the practical overseas Third World experience needed to teach them.

If it is not a matter of low demand, is it rather one of professional oligopoly -- the established members of the discipline preventing the fledglings, if you will, from trying their wings?

No, this is not the case either. Recall that during the Marshall Plan, Point IV, and afterward, many people who were about the same age entered the technical assistance and international development field at about the same time.

Constituting a kind of generation, they came of age together, made their important contributions together, and are now reaching the age of retirement together. When these great pioneers begin leaving en masse, the manpower deficit likely to occur will be extremely severe. Under such circumstances, established professionals are not anxious about competition. If anything, more and more of us are concerned as to whom the torch will be passed.

What, then, are the reasons underlying the falling-off of interest in international agricultural development?

Last month, the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development, which I have the pleasure of chairing, issued a paper on the more effective involvement of Title XII universities in international agricultural development (BIFAD, 1980). A large part of the paper was devoted to just this question of the growing undersupply of development professionals. Time prevents me from summarizing the analysis in great detail, but let me very briefly list what appear to be the major difficulties to be overcome.

### Internal Factors

The first set of problems is essentially internal, that is,

within universities themselves. In many institutions, appointment, promotion, and tenure policies fail to give appropriate weight to overseas assistance and international development activities by faculty or prospective faculty. Development is viewed by many scholarly peers as something rather removed from traditional teaching, research, and service; consequently, collegial tenure committees often inadequately understand the contributions of the internationally-oriented professor who comes before them. In addition, traditional state funding patterns tend to focus institutional efforts on domestic needs, providing at best limited incentives for overseas programs. As a group, university faculty remain startlingly deficient in foreign language skills and cross-cultural understanding, particularly with reference to the Third World and LDCs where the preponderant development efforts must take place. Salary structure is yet another internal university problem, with average salaries for international activity inadequate to attract outstanding personnel despite modest adjustments and annualizations. Finally, on the internal side, institutional administrative structures frequently place international development in low-visibility, low-status offices at the department level, with few or no linkages to the broader academic mission of the university. Even when activities are administered by a vice-president or someone at an equivalent level, integration

with other academic departments and colleges may be only tenuous.

### External Factors

What about the external constraints? To begin with, many faculty and administrators express continued uncertainty about the permanence of the AID program in particular, and Congress' commitment to international development in general. As the Committee on Institutional Cooperation noted over a decade ago:

The continuing struggle in Congress over appropriations for foreign aid, the sudden shift in emphasis within the program, the many reorganizations of the administering government agency, and the short tenure in office of the foreign aid administrators have combined to foster a widespread loss of confidence in the permanency of the U.S. technical assistance programs (Committee on Institutional Cooperation, 1968, 209).

Another external difficulty is AID's current preference for short-term "equity" projects -- projects running three to five years and targeting Congress' preferred "poor majority." The

short-term nature makes staffing and administration difficult, while the "poor majority" focus raises questions, at least with some faculty, about the larger effectiveness of the projects and the inefficient use of their professional skills (Wharton, 1978). Certainly the short-term effort is not the best mode for institution-building in host nations -- a process that is often desperately needed and potentially far more effective in achieving indigenous, self-sustained growth and development.

Other external difficulties that turn young faculty away from international agricultural development include the volatility of international relations; the limited involvement of university faculty in program design; single-year rather than multi-year project funding; AID's own frequent modification and redesign of its agency mission; and the delays in approval of the various projects and personnel by host nations. All of these factors have a strong propensity for discouraging the young agricultural economist, however strong his or her commitment to the international community. Moreover, the strong ongoing demand for agricultural economists in domestic development and training work provides a very attractive allure -- and income -- which gains even greater comparative advantage measured against the existing and potential disadvantages of going into international agriculture.

### III. Passing the Torch: First Steps

As the widening gap between the demand for international agriculturists and the supply of them has become increasingly apparent, some initial steps have been taken toward a remedy.

BIFAD has recommended and AID has implemented several improvements which I believe will help to expand the number of agriculturists with international experience and capabilities. One most important step has been the Strengthening Grant Program which provides federal funds to university international development programs on a 100 percent matching basis. The matching requirement has been deliberately designed to encourage state support for international agriculture. Strengthening grants have been approved and funded for some 46 colleges and universities ranging from \$31,400 to \$300,000, and an additional four institutions have been approved but not yet funded. Each grant is made on the basis of a carefully prepared and approved plan involving the use of the funds to strengthen the institution's international capability.

Activities range from language training for faculty and enhancing programs for women in development to mini-grants for junior faculty research overseas and increasing institutional

library holdings in development-oriented literature. Our review of the campus plans reveals that a very substantial portion of strengthening grants is being used to expand the number and capabilities of scientists and scholars for international work. These awards represent an important new departure which should help to revive the international dimension of our campuses.

Another step taken by BIFAD has been the adoption of the Collaborative Assistance Mode of contracting which permits universities to participate in designing overseas projects through cooperation with both AID and host governments. Collaborative Assistance contracting also provides more flexible contract arrangements, and allows the host government and contractor authority to make day-to-day decisions in the operation of the project.

These reforms have made it easier for universities to engage in international agricultural development which, in turn, tends to make the profession more attractive to young agricultural economists. What is additionally required is a coherent and general restructuring in two areas: first, within universities themselves, and; second, in the relationship between international development and U.S. foreign policy generally.

Within universities, international agriculture must be fully integrated into the overall academic mission and administrative structure of development-oriented institutions. It is not enough for universities to mount development projects when abundant funds are available -- then withdraw when money becomes tight. Indeed, to the extent that this has happened, the unflattering implication is that institutions have engaged in overseas assistance and development not out of commitment, but out of opportunism -- dare I say fiscal opportunism? Not every university should engage in international development, but those which do should go beyond fiscal stimulus - response mechanisms and establish their commitment on less shifting grounds.

Operationally, that will mean -- among other things -- modifying existing appointment, promotion, tenure, and merit pay policies to take adequate account of professional involvement overseas -- modifications that, in themselves, will have a healthy effect in attracting and keeping younger faculty. It will also be beneficial to increase the visibility of international programs, establish more ties between departments of agricultural economics and other academic departments, and increase the general awareness of the entire university community about just what international development

means. Perhaps most important, we need to demonstrate to our colleagues that "international agriculture is not a fourth program dimension . . . but rather a new arena for research, education, and extension activities, and that most assignments fall into one of these three traditional program areas" (BIFAD, 1980, 28).

Outside universities, international development must define a more stable place for itself within the larger context of U.S. foreign policy. The uncertainties I outlined earlier must be eliminated so that young faculty can embark upon development careers with some feeling of confidence that their experience and expertise will not become abruptly useless at some point in the intermediate future. Some elements of the redefinition should be longer-term project agreements between AID and Title XII universities;<sup>1</sup> longer authorization, contracting, and funding periods for Title XII sector programs and projects; and contracts that are awarded fully funded from the outset.

Obviously, there are much larger questions to be answered as well -- paramount among them, the question of why, when hunger and poverty kill and maim more people than wars, U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> "Title XII" refers to the amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act creating the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development and designating certain agricultural and land-grant colleges and universities for special involvement in AID's food, agriculture and nutrition programs abroad.

foreign policy still spends vastly more on defense than on international agricultural development. Indeed, the Presidential Commission on World Hunger has recently recommended that eliminating hunger -- not military assistance or even energy or trade -- should be the primary focus of U.S. relationships with the LDCs in the decade to come (Presidential Commission on World Hunger, 1980). If we could begin to effect that kind of reorientation of U.S. foreign policy, I suspect that a new generation of international agriculturists would appear almost overnight.

#### IV. Conclusion

The Hunger Commission concluded that we have in hand today the scientific and technical capability to end world hunger once and for all. A central component in achieving this goal will be the agriculturists in our colleges and universities -- especially our younger professionals -- tomorrow's development professionals. I like to think that the central importance of human capital in the ultimate resolution of this scourge for so much of the world was appropriately recognized when Ted Schultz was awarded the Nobel Prize. Both he and his fellow laureate, Sir Arthur Lewis, made their marks and contributions in the field of development. Yet much remains to be done.

Doug Bennet, administrator of AID, recently gave a talk entitled: "U.S. Opportunities in a Fast-Changing Third World." His message was that the United States has recently found itself presented with a number of unusual possibilities for forging stronger ties with the Third World and LDCs. Particularly favorable political developments, from the point of view of U.S. foreign policy, are the U.S. emphasis on human rights; Third World reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; turning over the Panama Canal to Panama; being on the "right side" in the Nicaraguan Revolution; improved U.S. relations with Black-majority countries in Africa; and our 30-year history of U.S. assistance to the Third World and LDCs. (Bennet, 1980, 1-8).

With Doug Bennet, I believe these and other events present us with real opportunities, yet at a time when the overall global political and economic configuration confronts us with perhaps the greatest peril since the end of the second world war. Surely international agricultural development has a growing role to play. It is up to us, therefore, to make certain that in the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond, our profession can provide the trained and committed manpower to respond to the challenge. However, much as been accomplished in the past, the future rests with the next generation. As today's development professionals, it is our crucial obligation to pave the way for tomorrow's.

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