

02885

DISCUSSION PAPERS ON
DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS,

Preliminary Version



PN-ABG-409 68850

SERIE de DOCUMENTOS
SOBRE PROBLEMAS del
DESARROLLO

Versión Preliminar

INTRODUCCION A LA SERIE DE DOCUMENTOS
SOBRE PROBLEMAS DEL DESARROLLO

A cada esfuerzo analítico que involucre a varios investigadores en diferentes instituciones y distintas oficinas se le presentan problemas difíciles relacionados con el intercambio de ideas que surgen del análisis y de la copilación de datos. Se ha iniciado esta Serie de Documentos con el fin de intercambiar información oportunamente con colaboradores. En vez de esperar hasta que los análisis hayan llegado a la etapa de convertirse en estudios "preliminarios" para circulación, hemos decidido distribuir, lo mas pronto posible, a un número muy restricto de colaboradores, estos datos como posible elementos de futuros marcos analíticos y como resultados muy preliminares. Este sistema tiene la ventaja de permitir una revisión oportuna de los datos y un cambio de dirección, si es necesario, así como también un intercambio de ideas. La obvia desventaja en esta Serie de Documentos es que se circula material que no ha sido corregido ni aprobado. Por lo tanto, los lectores de estos Documentos deben tener en cuenta su carácter completamente provisional.

Esperamos con interés los comentarios y las sugerencias que pudieran surgir de la circulación y lectura de estos documentos.

Estos datos y estos análisis no han sido aprobados por la A.I.D. ni por cualquiera de sus oficinas, y no deben citarse sin permiso, por escrito, de los autores.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCUSSION PAPERS SERIES

Every analytical effort involving various investigators in different institutions and locations faces the difficult problem of interchange of ideas, analysis, and data between the collaborating analysts. The Discussion Papers Series was originated to help in reducing that communication gap. Rather than wait until the analysis has matured to the "rough draft" stage for circulation, we have decided to distribute data files, initial sub parts of later analytical schemes, and preliminary results to a very restricted group of collaborators at the earliest possible stage. This approach has the advantage of allowing early review and redirection as well as cross-fertilization effects on other research efforts. The obvious disadvantage of the Discussion Papers Series is that uncorrected and untested materials are circulated. Readers of these pre-draft collections of data and narrative should keep in mind their highly provisional character and use them in the spirit that they were issued. We look forward to the helpful comments which the circulation was intended to elicit.

These data and analyses do not bear the approval (nor imply such) on the part of U.S.A.I.D. or any of its offices, and should not be quoted without written permission of the originating office.

DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 4

NATIONAL DECISIONS AND FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

Brandon Robinson September, 1972

Document Preparations: Paula Kittrell

Six broad affirmations or judgments are presented for consideration below:

1. The problems of development are extremely complex.
2. There is a growing appreciation of this complexity, the extent of which was greatly underestimated in the past.
3. The problems of development have been aggravated, and their complexity probably compounded by the population explosion.
4. Adequate understanding of the regional, national and local problems involved requires empirical analyses of much greater depth, breadth and precision than have been carried out in the past.
5. Development programs are more likely to be effective if they are based upon such analyses.
6. The developing countries should analyze their problems, prepare their own development strategies, and design their own programs, including those programs that depend, in part or entirely, on foreign assistance.

What bearing does the last assertion have on the five that precede it? Does it point to an inescapable conflict? Are the national decisions that are here being considered in necessary conflict with the improvement of programs and with the provision of effective foreign assistance? If the developing countries have the full task of carrying out the analyses and preparing the strategies, is it more likely that the strategies will lack the depth, breadth and precision required for the solution of problems? How can the foreign assistance agencies increase their reliance on the developing countries for analysis and strategy, and also increase the probability that the ensuing development programs will be more effective than such programs have been in the past?

II

The "lack of an institutional memory" is a charge frequently leveled against the national and international foreign assistance agencies--its official frequently scolded for failing to properly document their "experience." But memory and experience are not the same as understanding or intellectual grasp; and larger collections of "data" or "facts" simply add to the prevailing confusion if the selection of these "facts" has not taken place within the appropriate framework of concepts and by means of the appropriate procedures. Which are the facts can seldom, if ever, be decided before we

have determined the problems; and it is amazing how often our programs are launched without first obtaining a thorough understanding of the problems and sectors involved.

The failure to carry out a comprehensive detailed analysis of the appropriate areas or sectors prior to the preparation of projects or plans has been, I think, the most serious deficiency of past assistance programs--a deficiency related to two misconceptions about the development process and the forms of assistance most appropriate to it. In the first place, it has been widely believed that the basic problems are "known" and that these are the same all over the world--a misconception that is perhaps almost as widespread among officials in the developing countries as it is among officials in the foreign assistance agencies. But the problems are already known only in the crudest sense: there is a shortage of food, an inflationary condition, large scale unemployment, an appreciable gap in the balance of payments. And, of course, these are nothing more than beginnings--the most tentative and preliminary demarcations of the problematic area. As has been frequently observed, the precise definition of problems carries inquiry deep into understanding, or, put in another way, into the process of solutions. Advisors who arrive in foreign countries with the standard solution for the balance of payments problem, the inflation or the agricultural employment or output problem, invariably fail to solve the problem at hand. Since each balance of payments, inflationary and agricultural output "problem" has its own unique complexity

and its own particular interrelationships, these cannot be truly known until the best available general theory and analytical techniques have been applied to the situation in question--in other words, until the underlying factors and their interrelationships have been fully identified and measured.

In the second place, it has been frequently assumed that the process of development is essentially the same in every part of the globe, and that programs and activities deemed successful in the so-called developed nations should therefore be transferred to the developing countries. Although this belief has often been criticized by officials of foreign assistance agencies, these same officials have apparently been unable to translate their criticism into corrective actions. The reasons, I think, are not hard to find. The technical side of foreign assistance has placed great emphasis on standard practice, and paid very little attention to analysis. Unfortunately, the only practices a visiting functionary knows are his own practices, the practices of his own country or county. And so these are the practices he demonstrates. Nor will the effect of his demonstration be different because he is sufficiently cautious to make the verbal qualifications in fashion--for example, that the practices should be "adapted" and not simply "adopted."

These two misconceptions--that the problems are "known" and that the practices of the so-called developed countries constitute appropriate solutions--are, of course, closely connected. If there is no prior analysis

of the situation in question, or if the analysis is cursory and superficial, the unique characteristics and complexity of that particular situation cannot be taken into account: they have remained hidden from view, as it were. And since they do not appear they cannot call forth the appropriately specific, possibly unique, set of activities needed. On the other hand, the strong inner drive on the part of foreign assistance practitioners to get standard programs rolling leads them quite naturally into neglecting the prior analysis or, at best, into carrying it out in the quickest and most perfunctory fashion.

Now, the common, twin, complacent assumptions of many foreign assistance practitioners--that the problems are already known and that the only remaining task is to apply equally familiar solutions to these problems--would provide the eager critics of foreign assistance with ample ground on which to pace their indignation, were it not rather easy to demonstrate that the same twin assumptions have been saddled on domestic programs in so-called developed nations and held back their progress. In health and education, to name two obvious examples, standard programs have been carried out all over the world, year after year, at enormous expense to taxpayers without any clear evidence that the benefits bear a proper relation to costs. In the United States, for instance, after around one billion dollars have been spent for schools in less privileged areas under the compensatory Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act, an independent evaluation failed to show significant improvements. Perhaps the same pattern of misconceptions can be detected here.

The responsible authorities were convinced they knew what the problems were and what therefore should be done: a post hoc analysis by an independent organization proved them to be wrong on both counts.

Some reference should also be made to a widespread deficiency which is related to the two misconceptions just mentioned: we usually fail to take into account the experimental nature of social activities and, as a result, neglect to verify whether or not the expected consequences have actually ensued, and to observe and carefully record effects which were not planned or anticipated--omissions which delay the reform or improvement of programs to an incalculable degree. And when studies do properly precede the preparation of programs, there seems to be even less inclination to carry out the important and painstaking tasks of observing and recording their actual effects and of subjecting the subsequent and changed situation to a fresh analysis. I think it would be hard to estimate the waste--economic, social, cultural and moral--that has resulted from such gross neglect. To take another U.S. example, certain provisions in New Deal welfare legislation, well-conceived and beneficial in their day, became, as everyone now knows, increasingly inappropriate and, in time, distinctly harmful. If one considers the end of World War II as a turning point, one might say that 25 years elapsed before an effort was made to adjust the provisions in question to the new social realities. Isn't it perfectly obvious that there are very great flaws in the very best of established

procedures? As I see it, any particular practice or set of related practices will, sooner or later, become irrational and perhaps tyrannical, if the corresponding field of interrelated problems is not subjected to periodic analysis.¹

III

Reflection whether or not it is reasonable to expect government programs to solve domestic and international problems will lead the inquirer sooner or later to the social sciences--to a review of their present state of development as well as to an examination of their utilization by private parties and public authorities.

Only one aspect of this complex subject will be considered here, however: the general failure to set up fruitful forms of exchange between the institutions that deal mainly with facts and those that deal mainly with theory. Research, theories, programs and policies are basic kinds of activities which have enormous significance for one another, and which in many ways have been kept in relatively isolated compartments. On the other hand, it is necessary to add immediately that any sound proposal for establishing new relationships and

^{1/} The PPBS (Policy, Program, Budgeting System) should be expanded to the APPBS (Analysis, Policy, Program, Budgeting System.)

new forms of communication among these activities would not constitute a recommendation for ignoring their specific characteristics or blurring the distinctions between them. Policy-making must obviously range beyond the area of established programs. Theoretical speculations and so-called basic research obviously have their own terrains and their own particular rationales. Researchers and theory builders look for problems and come upon problems of no current interest to practice, examining issues which do not enter into prevailing policies and have nothing to do with the public's present concerns. But to the extent that these activities are carried out are carried out in isolated compartments, each one is bound to be poorer in quality than if it were kept in contact with the others, exchanging information and insights. Indeed, one might ask if the comparatively backward state of the social sciences is not due in part to the great distance between ongoing programs and activities on one hand, and theoretical developments and research on the other--that is, if it is not due to the gap between theory and practice. Whereas theories in the physical sciences are consolidated and extended through the constant empirical testing of hypotheses, social programs and other activities are not closely observed, nor are their effects carefully recorded as evidence for or against hypotheses in the social sciences. On the other hand, social practice in general, and government operations in particular, strive to isolate themselves from critical examination, and when examination comes, it usually comes in the less productive

form of political accusation.

Obviously, theory should be brought to bear more insistently on practice, but were that done it would not be enough. The experimental character of public programs must be fully acknowledged if the social sciences are to provide them with better procedures for analyzing and reanalyzing situations, identifying new significant issues, gathering relevant facts, periodically testing the assumptions or hypotheses on which programs are based, and systematically measuring the progress achieved in solving problems and approximating objectives--a long list, but no longer than necessary. To declare that social practices and the social sciences have entered into more fruitful relationships would be to declare, among other things, that social activities have drawn further away from standard unreflective behavior, and that social theory has enlarged its empirical ground by taking these activities into account.

Now, if these considerations do not seem completely irrelevant, it is, I believe, because there has been a growing dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of private and public activities, a growing conviction that these can be improved. The establishment of "evaluation procedures" and "information-management systems," the attempt to carry out "systems analyses" and "cost effective analysis," and the demand for greater "accountability" are all valuable but very partial attempts to make our programs more effective. It is my main contention that we will not enjoy noteworthy success until we bring about much closer collaboration between social theory and practice.

Returning to the subject of foreign assistance, I will not attempt to describe in detail the basic changes that constitute the proposed new approach. Since we have not brought social theory and practice to bear on each other with deliberation and method, I cannot offer verified hypotheses or detailed conclusions from a closely studied and carefully recorded past. And yet, I would like to suggest two broad changes in emphasis which may help us correct some past mistakes.

My main contention has already been made: detailed and comprehensive empirical analysis is a necessary condition for the adequate preparation of plans. The first basic change therefore is to more effectively establish analysis as a prior requirement. The translation of this general principle into action will require many kinds of changes in organization and method, some of which have already been proposed and are presently under consideration. For example, it is extremely important to realize that existing programming processes in foreign assistance agencies often fail to provide the right setting for careful analysis. The haste with which programs are frequently prepared in an attempt to obligate funds before the end of the fiscal year is a major obstacle to careful analysis and planning. The elimination of year-by-year appropriations, the planning of programs and the disbursement of funds over greater time-spans, and other similar recommendations now being considered or under way in various foreign assistance agencies, will help establish conditions under which adequate analysis and programming can be carried out.

It also seems reasonable to assume that a detailed and comprehensive analysis in each selected sector or field will lead to a coherent and unified strategy in that field which will replace the present piecemeal project approach. For example, in the agricultural and educational sectors there had been a tendency to proceed seriatim, seizing on a single phenomenon, building a project about it, and later discovering that it was not at the heart of the matter. Moreover, since the piecemeal approach leads to an excess of projects and to an excess of people to monitor them, it appears likely that a more comprehensive approach would help check bureaucratic growth. In domestic as well as international affairs, the piecemeal approach, the tendency to make every government program an addition to prior unaltered activities, and the equally egregious tendency of prior activities to go on forever, are, in great part, the results of the same common omission: the failure to carry out periodic analyses which would indicate, among other things, which activities should cease.

Moreover, acceptance of the experimental nature of all social and economic programs and the systematic use of these programs to accumulate information which will help determine and quantify basic relationships, should help eliminate programs which were ill-conceived. It should also help eliminate inopportune technical assistance which is merely a way of "passing the buck:" the postponment of a needed analysis through the alledgedly intermediate

step of providing an expert. Of course, I do not mean to assert that experts from the so-called developed countries are not on occasion needed abroad, but to suggest that the general neglect of analysis and carelessness with methodology often lead to an over-reliance on highly specialized advisors who appear on the stage at the wrong time, and tend to provide their foreign counterparts with training in the standard practices of their country or county, rather than in procedures for the identification and solution of certain kinds of problems. True, "practice" and "analysis" are not mutually exclusive: "analysis" is also a kind of practice, albeit the most flexible and complex; we are dealing with questions of emphasis, and should keep that in mind. But if the developing countries have become somewhat disenchanted with "experts," it is partly due, I think, to the over-emphasis foreign experts have given to their own inappropriate practices.

Finally, the objectivity which analysis introduces should help prevent a shift of development plans from the outdated to the radically new, which are seized upon merely because they are new. If change is desirable, so is continuity. If the understanding acquired through periodic analyses which break problems down into increasingly finer components helps us overcome an uncritical reliance on standard inputs and traditional practice, it

should also protect us from an uncritical acceptance of the latest innovation or fad. Precisely because the developing countries so urgently need increased amounts of goods and services to met the accelerating demands of exploding populations, we must be very circumspect in urging them to adopt the latest nostrums simply because they have been well advertised and not yet wholly discredited. It would be well to overcome the current fondness for gadgetry and to resist the current tendency to give precedence to organizations, systems and machines, forgetting that their purpose is to serve human beings and satisfy human needs.

V

The second basic shift in emphasis in foreign assistance that I would like to propose involves the development of new techniques to help establish analysis and evaluation as continuous processes in the developing countries themselves. True, foreign assistance agencies have usually followed the practice of laying down "self-help" requirements for making major grants or loans, but such requirements have been generally conceived as conditions necessary for the success of the project in question, and relatively little thought has been given to the establishment of a continuous problem-solving process in the country receiving assistance.

I have already suggested that the tendency to prescribe stock remedies,

to promote the current practices of so-called developed countries, and to neglect the need for a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the specific country situation involved, has been due largely to the mistaken belief that the problems of the developing countries are fairly standard, relatively simple problems, and their nature, causes, conditions and consequences comparatively easy to formulate. An eagerness to get activities underway, the frequent assumption that inappropriate activities would sooner or later be brought under scrutiny and somehow or other redirected, the rather indiscriminate application of the very broad concept of "take-off," all had the effect of deflecting attention from the urgent need to establish procedures for carrying out periodic empirical analyses of changing situations. Questions that should have been frequently asked were not asked at all.

Is the assistance now being provided making the greatest possible contribution to the country's problem-solving capacity in the particular field involved--agriculture, education, employment, exports or whatever? And by what other techniques can the country establish analysis and evaluation as continuous procedures integrated with the decision-making process in question?

Of course, the training of foreign officials in institutions abroad has usually been considered the kind of foreign assistance which has added most to problem-solving capacities. Perhaps the claim is justified. But I suspect that further inquiry into why the specialized training provided has not led to better national performance would lead us back to the contention that the lack of a comprehensive analysis has been a basic missing ingredient.

For such analysis would help determine the needs that could be met by training programs, were such programs individually prepared. Were the general strategy and the training programs based on the same comprehensive analysis, the training programs would be much more likely to facilitate implementation of the strategy, and the trained officials would find it much easier to apply their new knowledge and skills.

It would appear, then, that our second basic change, or major shift in emphasis, is to assure inclusion of procedures that will increase the kind of self-help that is most desperately needed--the establishment of continuous processes of analysis and evaluation in the developing countries. Obviously, the general or chronic neglect of analysis, and the uncritical reliance on standard practices, is characteristic of most, if not all, developing countries. If I have begun by emphasizing these mistakes and omissions in terms of the provision of foreign assistance, it is because I assume the foreign assistance agencies cannot help other institutions correct what they have not first rectified in themselves. How they can most effectively and most tactfully assist other institutions is a problem addressed in the section that follows. But it may be appropriate now to point out the programs of foreign assistance which are helping a country solve certain problems and, at the same time, are establishing problem-solving procedures, are precisely the foreign assistance programs that will contribute most to that nation's self-sufficiency.

Indeed, one might go so far as to state that considerably improved analytical, evaluative, planning and management procedures in the areas of basic requirements are essential to the developing countries, and that the failure to establish them might be nothing less than catastrophic. In education, for instance, it seems highly probable that the expansion of current services to satisfy the needs of populations which will double to triple during the next three decades entails costs which most of the developing countries will simply not be able to meet, and it may also be necessary to point out that if new and more productive systems of providing goods and services are established in the developing countries, they will have emerged from truly national processes of analysis and experimentation.

VI

Perhaps now we are in a better position to consider the apparent conflict between the nationalistic spirit of the developing countries and the desirability of providing foreign assistance which will not only help these countries improve their current programs but their decision-making procedures as well. A growing recognition that the appropriate strategies are seldom in anyone's possession, and that the underlying problems are more often than not awaiting detailed identification may not arouse the greatest of cheer, but it may have the healthy effect of bringing us closer to

the realities. The optimistic recipes of the 1950's and 1960's seem to have lost much of their attractiveness. Practitioners of foreign assistance are no longer so certain that the economic and social behavior of so-called developed countries can be taken as the ideal pattern for imitation, that the developing countries *must go through each one of a number of rather ill-defined "development stages,"* and that this is the only way to soar into the uncluttered empyrean of self-sustaining growth.

And yet, nothing would be more dangerous than to imagine that the rejection of the old roles and relationships--teacher-to-student or donor-to-receiver--and their replacement with what appear to be more attractive forms of collaboration and genuine two-way exchange will have the automatic, if not instant, effect of resolving the major complexities. Foreign assistance has too often been a matter of *fad*--a tendency which I think reflects the absence of procedures which would make activities self-informing and therefore self-correcting. Although this general lack, as I pointed out, also characterizes most programs in so-called developed countries, we must recognize that much greater obstacles stand in the way of establishing self-informing and self-correcting procedures under the aegis of foreign assistance, and that the most difficult question of all may be the one that faces us now. Under what kind of cooperative relationships are the two changes in emphasis, described in the preceding sections, most likely to take place?

Before attempting to answer this question I would like to make some preliminary observations. In the first place, it may be worth pointing out that a cooperative relationship does not preclude a separation of functions, and that a rational division of labor is usually the kind of relationship most satisfactory to the parties involved. Secondly, a division of labor in dealing with affairs as complex and as variable as those considered here must be in part a matter of emphasis. Different functions should be carried out by the different parties involved, but these differences should not entail interests which are mutually exclusive. In other words, a genuinely collaborative division of labor involves common interest and shared information. In the third place, the fact that the decision-making with which this paper deals is located mainly, if not exclusively, in official or governmental entities is simply a reflection of the fact that foreign assistance agencies deal by and large with governments. It seems reasonable to suggest that a major role may be played by market forces in the developing countries, that an objective analysis may contribute to an understanding of their operation, and that this concentration on the official decision-making machinery does not imply any particular position concerning the proper kind of intervention or control a government should exercise, but merely entails the assumption that a government should know what it does, and, to the greatest possible extent, why it is doing what it does. In any case, sovereign nations will make their own decisions concerning the role their

governments will play.

With these qualifications in mind, let us now reconsider the question of roles under an optimum division of labor, and begin by noting the sequence of phases or activities of what might, for want of a better term, be referred to as the development cycle: analysis, strategy, program design, implementation, evaluation, a new refined analysis, an ensuing revised strategy, etc. Obviously, important decisions will be made during each one of these phases, and although the role and function of the foreign assistance agency and the developing country may not be exactly the same in each phase, it is important here to emphasize the secondary role that should be played at each stage by the foreign assistance agency. Indeed, the emphasis of this paper on prior analysis can also be looked upon as an attempt to shift foreign assistance from where it has been and put it in its proper place as a support to activities that are a part of a truly national program. In other words, the developing country should make its own analysis of the particular situation in question--such as the educational or agricultural sector, employment, exports, fiscal and financial policy, or whatever and fashion and carry out its own strategy, observing, recording and measuring effects in order to evaluate the analysis; and it should begin the cycle again at a subsequent and appropriate moment in time with an analysis of the new situation, utilizing the specific understanding and general knowledge obtained in the interim. Government orientation

or direction of the development process may be thus conceived, and foreign assistance may be involved in any one of the stages.

What do we mean here by "foreign assistance," and what would be the nature of its involvement? There appear to be two general categories of foreign assistance: the more markedly internal process of study, analysis and appraisal, generally related to the review of large-scale financial requests; and the more emphatically collaborative process usually referred to as "technical assistance," under which recommendations are made and ideas are exchanged with the developing country concerned. It is now generally agreed that when the review and advisory functions are carried out together or in close collaboration, the developing country and the foreign assistance community obtain a fuller understanding of the field or sector involved, and the capital assistance and the technical assistance are more likely to support one another. And since the effectiveness of each step or stage in the "development cycle" is in great part dependent upon the effectiveness of the preceding stage, financial or technical assistance should be provided, if needed and requested, for activities at any one of the stages. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out once again that the step most neglected to date has been the detailed and comprehensive analysis--the first logical stage of the process--and it is, I believe, most probable that this major neglect lies behind many of the failures and ensuing frustrations of the developing countries.

A major shift in emphasis is therefore required from the foreign assistance

agencies. The commitments to carry out their own analyses and to help establish analytic processes in the developing countries will, I believe, help the foreign assistance agencies steer between the Scylla of waiting passively for the developing countries to fashion programs to which assistance can be provided and the Charybdis of impatiently, and perhaps arrogantly, designing programs for them. By dedicating itself more systematically to empirical analysis, the foreign assistance community will be acknowledging its present great lack of understanding. By making its collaboration a more deliberate and systematic process of learning, by more carefully articulating the basic premises or hypotheses on which national programs are based, and by more careful recording of the results communicated by the countries concerned, it will, I believe, be developing a more orderly body of general knowledge and, above all, more effective techniques, than it now possesses. In other words, it will be in a better position to provide the developing countries with general laws and tested relationships and with methodologies that have been refined over time.

I think the universality, or, if you will, neutrality, of this approach will make foreign assistance much more attractive to the developing countries. Moreover, the establishment of effective analytical processes in the developing countries will make it easier for the foreign assistance community to maintain truly collaborative relationships with these countries, exchanging knowledge and information with regularity, and not merely during the tense

difficult moments of loan negotiations. Finally, to the extent that advice is provided, it will fall more heavily on the methodological than on the programming side, on the how, rather than on the what--for example, how to carry out a sector analysis in agriculture, how to prepare a sector strategy which comes to grips with the basic problems revealed by that analysis, and how to establish systematic procedures for observing and recording the effects of activities.

This, then, is my reply to the question posed in Part I: how can the foreign assistance agencies increase their reliance on the developing countries for analysis and strategy, and also increase the probability that the ensuing development programs will be more effective than such programs have been in the past?