

ROLE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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It is very significant and highly appropriate that this series of lectures deals with the question of public administration in developing countries, and that this particular subject should be considered under the general auspices of the Department of Agriculture of the United States. This department, in many ways, has been a pioneer in the effective administration of the public interest in our country and in the application to public issues of the best of modern science, technology, and advanced ideas in other fields. In a sense, what the Department of Agriculture has done in the United States is what is needed to be done by public administration in developing countries. Therefore, it seems to me especially significant that we have this series of lectures under these auspices.

I'd like to start with a brief illustration or two of the kind of thing the Department of Agriculture has done, because I think this is an important foundation for what I want to say in a few minutes.

For example, the Department of Agriculture has developed a systematic method for conducting research and applying the results of that research to questions of production, to questions of marketing, to questions of the use of agricultural products. It has developed a system of experiment stations and extension services and has worked closely with the land grant colleges throughout our country.

The Department of Agriculture of the United States pioneered in the development of credit institutions which were devised and adapted to the particular needs of American farmers. Some of these institutions have evolved and developed very radically from what they were when they started. The Farm Credit Administra-

tion, for example, starting as a public institution, is today essentially privately owned.

The Department has devised crop forecasting and other services related to marketing which provide information and help to farmers. The Department has worked in the fields of cooperatives and of rural electrification. Today, it has embarked on a broad new approach to the problem of rural development, bringing to bear all of the resources that can be found locally and nationally.

In all these ways—and this is the key point that I want to emphasize—this Department has pursued a course which is pragmatic, probing, experimental, and designed to meet real problems in the public interest.

In one sense, the work of this Department is remarkably non-ideological. If you look back, you find all sorts of mixtures of public and private activity. If you review the actual experience of United States agriculture it is very hard to fit it into the contemporary argument of socialism versus the free market. Specialized institutions have been developed to meet actual problems and they contain varying mixtures of public and private activity. We do not have socialism in the United States, nor do we have an Adam Smith type of free market.

In one sense, therefore, you would look in vain for a clear-cut ideological basis for what the Department has done. In another sense, I think you can in fact find some very deep and important ideological convictions underlying what the Department has accomplished.

First of all, the Department's efforts, the efforts of the people who have worked here and of those in the Congress who have determined what the Department should do, have throughout been guided by a deep belief in local self-reliance, in individual initiative and enterprise, in handling things as far as possible through small and local groups, and in limiting the Federal Government's efforts to what could only be done through the national government.

Secondly, the Department is essentially a governmental institution. As such it operates within a framework of group pressures, of political pressures, in a democratic political system. As a result, our agricultural programs and policies are full of strains, full of imprecision, full of argument and controversy, but also, by the same token, they rest on the deep strength of the consensus of the population of this country.

The results of all of this effort, as everyone knows, has been an enormously productive agricultural system in the technical sense, and in the sense of producing good lives for millions of people who have worked in agriculture, or who have grown up in rural homes and have gone on to other walks of life.

I stress these elements because, it seems to me, they have a direct bearing on the question before us today—the role of public administration in developing societies. If you consider all the aspects of the Department of Agriculture, you could say that this is what we envision when we say that the public administration in developing countries must be improved, must be developed, must be created.

As we visit and work in the underdeveloped countries, and look at the problems on the ground—look, say, at the problem of rural life and rural development in West Pakistan or India, which is essentially characterized by people living in villages, farming on small plots of land, with very few technical resources, plowing with a crooked stick, using oxen as motive power, the villages being without electricity, without running water, without sewage systems, without schools, many of them, without means of communication, radio, newspapers—going into that kind of a situation, an American inevitably thinks to himself what is needed in this situation is the kind of services that the Department of Agriculture provides. Research services are needed, to find out how to apply better systems of technology to the problems here. Educational and extension services are needed, to get those better ideas across to the farmers who live here. Better supply systems are needed, to get fertilizer, better implements and tools, and other items to the

farmers. Better marketing advice is needed so the farmers will know better what to plant, better marketing systems so they will earn more from their output.

In short, it is a very natural conclusion, when you work in an underdeveloped country, that one of the things that is needed is something like the Department of Agriculture, or more broadly, the system of agricultural institutions we have in the United States. And, if you look at other fields of life in those countries, you come to similar conclusions.

If you look at the schools, if you look at the highway system, if you look at the housing arrangements, if you look at the taxation services—wherever you turn in an underdeveloped society—you see the very great requirement for effective public administration, and you find yourself thinking, “If we only had here the services and institutions we have in the United States, this place would be a lot better off. Therefore, let us go out and start creating the same institutions.”

And here I come to the thesis of what I have to say today, which is that the latter conclusion, in my opinion, is wrong—is erroneous. By and large, I think it is a mistake to conceive that what we are trying to do in underdeveloped societies is to duplicate the institutions that we have here. I think the observation that the people in underdeveloped societies need the kinds of resources and services for solving their problems that we have is probably a correct observation. But to go from that to the conclusion that they need parallel institutions—the same kind of institutions that we have—is where I think we go wrong.

My thesis is that we cannot transplant United States systems and institutions in the field of public administration. Instead, it seems to me, we should be trying to develop effective systems and institutions in other countries that grow out of their background, fit their environment and their capabilities and their problems—institutions that will enable them to meet their needs in progressively more satisfactory fashion as the years go by.

I'd like to try to support this thesis essentially by raising four questions.

The first question is, what has been our experience, what have we done thus far in trying to help underdeveloped countries improve their public administration? Are we in danger of trying to improve public administration in developing countries simply by copying advanced countries' institutions and methods and therefore failing in our fundamental task?

The basic methods we have used, with some variations, have been two. First, we have brought to the United States large numbers of persons from underdeveloped countries. These may have been students, in the strict sense, or they may have been government officials, or officials of other kinds of institutions. Second, we have attempted to establish, in the underdeveloped countries, schools, institutions, and departments of public administration, in local colleges and universities, or in separate agencies or institutions of one kind or another.

So far as the training is concerned, we have brought to this country several thousand young people, under the foreign aid program, to study public administration in the direct sense. In fiscal year 1963, more than 700 were selected for public administration training. In addition, we bring persons to this country to study agriculture or education or health or some other functional field, and a substantial part of their training while here naturally is related to the administration of such specialized services.

Our experience indicates certain obvious risks in doing this sort of thing. Are we simply teaching these people how we solve our problems and not teaching them how to solve their problems? Does it do any good, for example, for a public health engineer to learn how the municipal waterworks in Cleveland is run when his problem, when he gets back home, is going to be to try to install systems of pumps in villages where there is no effective water supply at present apart from streams and ponds? Is it useful for public administrators from underdeveloped countries to come

here and learn how the Internal Revenue Service does its job, when back in his own country nobody has ever been sent to jail for tax evasion and there is, therefore, no effective sanction for the kind of taxation system we have here?

These are questions that we must answer in considering training programs for the participants we bring here. So far as the establishment of schools and institutes abroad is concerned, there are also risks—mainly the risk that we duplicate the form and not the substance. I have personally seen cases in which a school of public administration was established in an underdeveloped country, the degree of M.P.A. was offered, the substance of the instruction was quite similar to what would be offered in this country at Syracuse, or some other good school—and then the graduate had no place to turn, because the government in that country had no understanding or appreciation of an M.P.A., no desire for people with M.P.A. training, and, in general turned a very cold shoulder to the persons who had gone through this advanced training.

Other risks in such a course, in establishing schools and institutions abroad, are equally obvious. Any of us can read reports that have been developed in such schools and institutes—studies, for example, of village government—which are very interesting to us, and very impressive to anthropologists, but relate to nothing in the local society and have no impact when produced.

I state these questions in rather extreme form deliberately because I think they are real and have to be met. I do not, however, conclude from this that the training we have been doing, or the efforts to establish schools and institutes abroad, have been wasted. Quite the contrary. In my observation, in most cases the persons who were managing the training programs for these visitors, and the persons who were organizing the schools and institutes abroad, were well aware of these risks and set out to meet them. A person who was going to be concerned with drilling wells in villages was not sent to look at the municipal waterworks in Cleveland, but was sent out, perhaps with the Bureau of Reclamation, in a spe-

cially organized training program, so that he did learn something that would be useful to him when he went back home. Persons who have set up schools and institutes abroad have been very deeply concerned about trying to build something which would have roots in the local scene and effectiveness there.

The reason I state these questions so sharply is to emphasize the point that we must aim at the right target. When we bring people here for training, or when we try to establish institutions abroad, we should be emphasizing the problem solving capability. We are not in a position to impart the knowledge that they need. To a very large extent, we don't have it.

I was making this point in a recent conversation, and using as an illustration the skills, the abilities, the competences one would need to run a Department of Agriculture in a developing country. Someone summarized the point precisely by saying, "The fact is, there isn't anybody in the United States who knows how to run a Department of Agriculture in a developing country." We can't teach them that. We can teach them some things that will be useful. We can show them how we do some things from which they can learn. But we must never be under the illusion that we have, ready made, a set of ideas and blueprints which we can simply hand over for application in underdeveloped countries. Their problems are different from ours.

Let me mention briefly, in closing, several elements of the problem which the developing countries inevitably must face and we do not. First, they must face the problem of priorities, in a way that we don't. If they started out to duplicate the full range of agricultural facilities that are available in the United States, even if they understood that those facilities would have to be adapted to the local background, it would be a hopeless agenda. They could not possibly do it for many, many years. In consequence, they have to select those things to do first.

This is not a problem we face today. We went through it years ago. It was solved in some manner, but none of us here remem-

bers how, for we weren't involved in those decisions. But that is a kind of problem they have every day in all the underdeveloped countries, and which we don't really understand very much about.

Secondly, they have enormous problems of dynamics, of very rapid change in their societies. They are bridging centuries in a few years. These are problems we have not faced. They add dimensions and aspects to the problems concerning which we have very little to offer.

Thirdly, they often have language problems which are far more serious than anything in our own experience. You know the situation in the subcontinent of India, where there are seventeen different major languages, each spoken by more than five million people. What does it mean to build an agricultural system in India with that kind of language problem as part of the surrounding framework of conditions? We don't know what that problem is like, but they have to solve it.

And finally, the problems of motivation, which most of us take for granted, are very different problems in the different societies and cultural backgrounds which exist in the various underdeveloped countries. But they must be met before any substantial step forward can be taken.

This all supports the proposition that we should be primarily concerned with trying to help create the problem solving capability, when we are working on public administration problems in underdeveloped countries.

A second question which I would raise is that, in my opinion, we typically think of public administration in too narrow a framework in our training programs and in establishing curricula, subjects for research, and so on. Public administration necessarily is set in a framework of attitudes, mores, beliefs, and this point must be kept in the forefront of our work in underdeveloped countries. Let me give you a couple of illustrations.

First, as many observers in underdeveloped countries have pointed out, one of the difficulties in developing an improved public

administration frequently is a serious deficiency in standards of honesty and integrity. It would be easy to be "holier than thou" about this. It would obviously be a great exaggeration to say that this is a problem that doesn't exist in the United States. Plainly it does, but not to the same degree. There is really a very substantial difference. The standards for public behavior in the United States, with all their deficiencies, and despite all the times they're honored in the breach, are much clearer and much higher than those in many underdeveloped countries, and this is a problem that must be met. Now the question is: how is this to be done? What do we know about the way to create an attitude among public servants that will establish high standards of service to the public interest?

I suspect some useful work on this subject could be done if we had some well-directed historical research. I'm reliably advised by one of my ex-colleagues on a university faculty that there are many instances in our own history and in British history where public services were at least as corrupt and graft ridden as any today in any part of the underdeveloped world. The example used by the person who told me about this was the British customs service in the 17th century, which is asserted to have been as corrupt a public service as ever existed anywhere. That isn't true today. Today we all think of British public services as models of integrity and honesty. The question is: how did they get from there to here?

This is the question that confronts many underdeveloped countries today. Most of us don't know how to begin answering that question. But it is a real question and it has to be faced and it's one of the elements of any useful work on public administration in underdeveloped countries.

A second illustration. We take for granted in the United States that a democratic attitude exists in any group that we are involved in. This has a very long history in our own society. The town meetings in New England and many, many other roots make it

automatic and natural for us to think in terms of democratically organized local groups, whether public or private, as essential aspects of any effort to do something for any community. But this sort of thing does not exist in many parts of the world.

In India, for example, there is no strong tradition of local self-government. There is, instead, an unbroken tradition for five thousand years of imperial, centralized government. Through all that period of time, the villages have had a rudimentary local organization. There is no background on which there could have been developed, for example, systems of local control and local financing of education. This is not a tradition in India.

Think of the difference. When we think of education our whole basic set of concepts rests on the notion that this is a local function, locally controlled and locally financed. It is exactly the opposite in India and in many other countries, and the whole problem of public administration in the field of education—the problem of effectively developing, planning, and operating an educational system—takes on an entirely different context. It is an entirely different kind of a problem, starting from these two different types of backgrounds. This again demonstrates that in thinking about how to improve public administration in underdeveloped countries, we have to take into account a far broader range of issues than are sometimes thought of as being related to public administration. We have to develop an attitude of research, of curiosity about the surrounding circumstances, of experimentation, and of problem solving if useful work is to be done.

I'd like to raise as a third question, a rather sensitive point which, I think, supports my main thesis that we do not have answers that can be easily transferred to underdeveloped countries.

Would we not agree that there are problems that we have not solved satisfactorily for ourselves? In such areas, we certainly have little basis for using ourselves as a model.

The first and perhaps most obvious of these is the problem of urbanization. Many observers in the United States, I think with a

great deal of merit, are pointing out that we have extremely serious problems in the growth of "megalopolis"—the vast arrays of urban population, incoherently organized, with rapid movement to the suburbs leaving the deteriorating downtown sections behind, with serious problems of traffic, juvenile delinquency, and all the rest. And when one asks what we could say to the city fathers of Calcutta, India—a city of several million persons—if they came to us and said, "What is the experience in the United States that I can draw on to advise me how effectively to organize Calcutta to meet its problems?" I'm afraid that we might conclude there isn't much we could offer. I suspect the conclusion to draw is that there are many problems faced by underdeveloped societies and also by ourselves, with respect to which our best attitude is one of, "Let's work on these problems together; let's see if, together, we can undertake research and experimentation that will be useful for all of us."

Other illustrations of the same point are the problem of steady and substantial economic growth, a problem the United States has not distinguished itself in solving in recent years, and the problem of developing effective international organizations. In the United Nations, in the international financial institutions, in the common market in Europe, in many other cases, we have institutions developing today, which are often clumsy, hard to manage, expensive, and quite inefficient. At the same time, they are all we have. They are attempts to meet real problems which must be met through international cooperation and organization. Clearly, our problem is to learn from experience and improve these institutions as rapidly as we can. And that is a problem we and the underdeveloped countries have in common.

Lastly, I would point to a final question which is: how would we deal with problems that the underdeveloped countries have and the advanced countries have not? Let me give two illustrations. First, the problem of what has come to be called (at least in government circles) the problem of insurgency, which ranges all the way from riot control to guerrilla warfare. This problem of active

terrorism, active conflict, guerrilla type activities, exists in many countries today. It exists and it has to be solved. It frequently requires a sophisticated and complicated method of solution which makes great demands on the system of public administration; and yet, by and large, it is a problem the advanced countries cannot claim to have studied very thoroughly. We have few books or courses about it. We have to join in trying to work out solutions with the people in countries that are actually on the firing line.

The other illustration I would offer is the problem of population control. Many countries want to achieve population control. The people of many countries are deeply anxious to do so. None of us today has either the technical or the social and governmental advice to offer which would enable them to do so. It's not a problem we have tried to meet through governmental means in this country, nor would I expect that we will in the future. But it is an illustration of the kind of question which public administration must be prepared to meet in underdeveloped countries.

Let me conclude by stating the major points that I have been suggesting here this afternoon. First, it is indeed true that the improvement of public administration is a critical need in underdeveloped countries. You can, if you wish, say that there is no need more critical. Secondly, I think we have made some headway in learning how to help underdeveloped countries achieve that improvement in public administration—but insofar as we have accomplished this, we have done so not by teaching them solutions to their problems, but by helping them to establish a problem solving capability.

Finally, I think it is plain that we are dealing with a subject which has a very ample agenda of unfinished business. It's a fascinating field. There are many, many, important unanswered questions which will call on many of us, including I hope many of you here, to engage ourselves through active participation, or research, to help solve in the years to come. I hope that the remaining lectures in this series will cast light on some of these unanswered questions.