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Agricultural Aid For The 70's — A Critical View

by

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Editor's note: Charles J. Maguire whose home is in Dublin, Ireland, took his B.S. in agriculture at the Vocational University of Ireland in 1960. He spent the next 2½ years in Eastern Nigeria as a teacher. He came to Minnesota in 1966 to work on a Masters Program in Agricultural Education. On completion of this program he worked in a government Agriculture School in Ireland for a short period taking a three year appointment as an extension training officer in Zambia. Presently enrolled in a Ph.D. program, he plans to return to the area of international assistance.

The beginning of a new year and a new decade presents an opportune time to pause and critically survey the field of agricultural aid to developing nations.

The widening technology gap between developed and developing nations virtually guarantees the indefinite continuance of educational and technical assistance.

Continuing population growth, increasing need for educational, medical, and social services, efforts to strengthen and expand growing economies, and the critical importance of improved world understanding and tolerance demand that aid should be used to its greatest advantage.

Yet, it is no secret that much of the educational and agricultural assistance to emerging nations has not made its potential contribution for a variety of reasons. The unfortunate fact is that the same errors on the part of aider and aided tend to recur with disappointing frequency.

The one relatively simple aid scene has become complex. The trickle of emerging nations of the 1940's became a torrent in the late 50's and 60's as colonial powers relaxed their grip. The traditional aiders — Britain, France, and the USA have now been joined

by Russia, Japan, China, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, and an array of Foundations plus national and international organizations in an effort to bring emerging nations into the technological age.

The growing volume and diversity of aid with its alarming lack of co-ordination and direction requires an immediate examination of motives, philosophies, attitudes, and expectations of both aider and aided. This is necessary if this truly international "industry" is to make its full contribution toward a better world.

A Word to the Agricultural Aider

One of the most difficult tasks of any teacher is to ascertain the level of his pupils' understanding and to communicate at that level. We can safely paraphrase and say that one of the most difficult tasks for a Foundation, Government, or International Organization, based in the developed world, is to ascertain the real needs of agriculture in developing areas. In the developed countries agriculture is no longer a "way of life" but a business. To the economist and computer of the international aider, agriculture is reduced to inputs and outputs. But farming in developing areas is still people.

Not, alas, well educated, mechanized, monied, well-informed people, being serviced by complex, long-established Government and industrial agencies, but illiterate, unmechanized, poorly-informed people without, in many cases, a monetary system of trade, being cared for by young and inexperienced poorly staffed government agencies and not attractive enough financially to attract the services of industry.

The brain-child of the boardroom econo-

mist or management expert can rarely be transported across the development gap without suffering badly in its new environment.

Too often programs of agricultural aid have been foisted upon developing nations despite the fact that every experienced worker in international programs knows that projects should only commence in response to an expressed and identified need.

Perhaps in the early days of assistance this was not such a serious error on the part of the aider, but now many of the variables have drastically changed.

However distasteful, we have to face the fact that aid has been used by major powers as bait in the international politics contest. East and West have "out-aided" each other in a bid to secure political support from fledgling nations. Indeed the lure worked for many years, but now the time has come to realize that this particular contest has lost its popularity. Newly-founded nations, at last free of colonialism, are shrewd enough to see that economic colonialism can easily replace the old pattern and they will avoid being snared at all costs. This factor can explain some of the "unreasonable" conditions imposed by the recipients of aid on expatriate staffing, budget control, length, type, and location of project, status of aid mission, and restrictions on the training of "developing" personnel in the aider's schools.

Many times the aider has been too ambitious on behalf of the recipient. Projects conceived in a technological atmosphere, without due investigation of the environment in which they would grow and succeed, often appeared to fill an ideal theoretical need only to fail miserably when implemented. The design of projects from a "developed" viewpoint must be reviewed if aiders are to avoid the perennial pitfalls associated with agricultural aid.

Of course, there is another side to this argument which holds equally true. Many times the recipients of aid have been too ambitious in their plans. In an effort to make the great leap forward in agriculture, to become self-sufficient and develop export surplus without adequate staff, communications, education, markets, and skills, many developing nations committed badly needed funds, manpower, and time to projects which could not succeed.

Failure of an aid project, however ill-conceived, brings recriminations from both sides. The donor feels let down, feels that

the recipients are even more backward than originally imagined, and a subconscious veto is stamped on future projects for that nation. The recipient of the ill-starred project is sour. He "knows" that the aider did not send his best personnel, he "knows" that the aider had no real interest in the success of the project, and he makes a subconscious note to be wary of future overtures from that source.

All of which brings us to what should be a very elementary rule for the aider: project decisions must be made by personnel experienced in agriculture and education who have the training and the technical and practical knowledge to assess the feasibility of a project and the skill to see it through as quickly and effectively as possible.

This automatically leads to another extremely urgent point, namely, streamlining of organizational machinery. Decisions in agriculture and educational programs in developing countries are frequently demanded at brief notice and action has to be taken immediately. A request for additional funds, material, or personnel must be acted upon automatically. This cannot be done if the organization is a bureaucratic maze.

More than any other field of aid, agriculture needs local autonomy for its projects. Nature is not susceptible to logical reasoning and alterations in climatic, ecological, and pathological conditions demand an immediate response from project personnel. Decisions made locally are superior to those diluted by distance.

The importance of improved communication between all concerned cannot be overstated. The success or failure of a project frequently hangs on this valuable skill.

Consider the expert steeped in logical economic doctrines and rich in technical lore. He carefully designs a project putting down a firm base and planning for sound and steady growth over a reasonable period of time. Given the climatic, financial, and political breaks the way appears clear.

Now consider the political leader torn between the good sense of the experts plan and the urgency to become self-sufficient and expert. Without oil, minerals, or established industry he must turn to primary products for salvation.

The project becomes a contest between aider and aided with both parties equally promise brings disappointments and, too sincere. Failure to communicate and compromise brings disappointment and, too often, bitterness to all.

Giving is not a game for amateurs.

Finally, to the donor, a warning that agricultural or educational aid to developing nations cannot be evaluated by the usual rules. The input-output rules do not normally apply and while success by developed standards is easily seen, failure has a very elusive definition.

To the Recipient of Aid— Some Guidelines

Leaders of the developing world can be excused for their urgent approach to all phases of development. They want to build industry and agriculture, they want to find an identity for their nation, they want to pay their bills, they want to improve communications and the general well-being of their people.

Despite the eagerness to do all these things NOW, one must caution against deploying the small supply of human and capital resources on a multiplicity of fronts and expecting equally good results all around.

There must be a call for distinguishing between wants and needs.

Aiders can help here by offering assistance on essential projects rather than on items of prestige.

The recipient must be discerning in his choice of aid. Far too often, due to good salesmanship by the aider or politeness on the part of the recipient, irrelevant projects have been initiated in developing countries.

Deserted buildings, unfinished roads, decaying machinery, and mouldering files in government attics testify to the failure of many such abortive attempts at aiding development.

It is much more practical to decline a project which appears unsuited than to accept a scheme because it is offered "free".

Before accepting aid in the form of machinery, buildings or vehicles the recipient must realize that although the capital expenditure is free the recurrent costs to keep the gifts in working order begin to rise.

Doubling the number of agricultural schools means more staff, more food, more furniture, more books, more power, more expenditure all around.

More machines or vehicles mean more mechanics, more drivers, more gasoline, more tires, more spare parts, more expenditures all around.

Just as the aider needs experienced and skilled personnel if he is to give wisely, so too the recipient needs people of similar caliber if projects are to succeed. No one is better suited to discuss and judge the merits of a proposed agricultural project than a man or woman skilled and experienced in the field of agriculture. Such people must however, be able to adapt to a particular situation and not inclined to transfer programs with which they are familiar to another culture.

Finally, it may be possible to see results from industrialization over a short span of time, but agriculture is a slow developer. Rural people everywhere are slow to change, the elements are not always predictable, world markets change demand for products without warning. Agriculture is one of the most difficult industries to manage well so "miracle" improvements are not to be expected. In general, a few carefully chosen projects well-planned, and adequately staffed will do better in the long term than many ill-conceived and hastily implemented.

Some Parting Thoughts

It would be naive to pretend that the foregoing sums it all up neatly. The points raised are the more obvious and regrettably, are seen more clearly in the field than in the board rooms of the developing world.

Indeed there are other elements of agricultural aid which urgently cry for examination and revision. Amongst the more important questions to be answered are these:

Are our traditional methods of agricultural aid good enough? Do we need to update our projects in the light of economic and political change? Does Africa, Asia, or Latin America of the 70's require a new approach to development in Agriculture?

Do we need to reappraise the caliber, qualifications, and motivations of personnel who launch and guide these projects? Is there a need for personnel to identify with a project by seeing it beyond the traditional year to an eighteen month period? Is there, in fact, a case for career project planners, managers, and administrators? Are we satisfied with our existing evaluation criteria for agricultural projects?

Do we need to overcome national, and often irrational, pettiness and strive to work with other aiding nations and organizations in an effort to overcome waste, duplication, and general ineffectiveness in the areas where help is needed?

There is no easy formula which can be applied to the solution of these questions. Liberal doses of honesty, research, and co-operation speedily applied could help.

However, it must be borne in mind that the biggest danger of the new decade is that the developed world, beset by the problems of urbanization, pollution, recession, the demands of minorities and the shadow of nuclear war, may fail to realize that despite the efforts of the 60's the developing world still cries out for help.

If all members of the aid equation are prepared to examine the standpoints critically and make worthwhile concession and improvements, the 70's could become a more fruitful decade for agriculture in developing areas. If not, the technological gap will widen even more rapidly making more critical the unequal share of progress which is mankind's lot today.

Dr. Swanson Named to World Committee on Agricultural Education



Dr. Gordon I. Swanson, Professor of Agricultural Education and Coordinator of International Programs for the College of Education at the University of Minnesota, has been named to an international committee on agricultural education.

Dr. Swanson was appointed to serve on the Advisory Committee on Agricultural Education, Science and Training. This is a cooperative effort of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Labor Organization.

The purpose of the committee is to "advise to Directors-General of the three or-

ganizations on the planning and execution of programs of agricultural education and science training, as well as rural employment.

Dr. Swanson has been a member of the faculty of the Department of Agricultural Education since 1949 and has served as Coordinator of International Programs for the College of Education since 1964. Prior to his appointment to the University faculty, Dr. Swanson taught vocational agriculture at Alexandria, Minnesota. During World War II he served in the U.S. Marine Corps from which he retired with the rank of Major. He has been active in international education programs since 1956 when he served a term as director of agricultural education and science with UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

The Role of the Vo-Ag Teacher

"The role of the Vo-Ag teacher as a school representative is an opportunity and a challenge, and also a profound professional responsibility. The ag teacher must personify the professional educator. He must be well-trained, he must be competent, he must serve the needs of his students and his community, and he must be ethical and reflect the best characteristics of the dedicated career teacher and certainly such a teacher will also be a member of his professional organizations."

A professional teacher of agriculture is an active member of his community. Service to community is a responsibility for anyone who wants to accept the rewards of our democratic way of life. The image of the agricultural teacher is drawn largely from the quality and range of service to his community. Few professions offer greater opportunity for distinguished performance.

Today in the United States over one million teachers guide the education process of our people. Some begin the day's task with zest and skill; others begin the day as if in pain and resentment. Now, there must be a single thread which ties together this army of teachers, and that must be that the teacher's role gives satisfaction that no other profession could possibly give. This professional satisfaction is yours also if you have these goals:

1. You give intelligent effort to your work and then you can rightfully expect that teaching will always be called the "mother of professions."
2. Give mastery of subject matter and methods to your work, and then you can rightfully expect to be called a "specialist."