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INTERNATIONAL DIVISION
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

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Dr. Sterling Wortman
Rockefeller Foundation
111 West 50th Street
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Dear Sterling:

I have not died although you would be justified in thinking I had in view of my failure to respond earlier to your request for comments and suggestions on your thoughtful discussion paper entitled "An International Agricultural Development Institute". Since I do not have a good excuse to offer for my extreme tardiness, I think I had better not offer any.

I think you have put your finger on a problem of major importance to developing countries, donor countries and international centers, namely, how are projects and programs designed to strengthen the agricultural research services of LDCs going to be staffed?

I start from the premise that if the world's rapidly increasing population is to be fed in the years ahead, even at present levels of intake, it is essential that:

- the agricultural research services of LDCs be improved as rapidly as possible until they reach or approximate international standards of competence;
- international centers continue to be strengthened and adequately financed; and that
- agricultural research services in LDCs be effectively linked with international centers and the research services of developed countries to form a worldwide network of research organizations engaged in trying to find solutions to the world's food problems.

I am becoming concerned about the increasing pressures it seems to me international centers are under to undertake what I would call technical assistance projects (or institutional development projects) aimed at strengthening agricultural

research services in LDCs and helping LDCs with their accelerated food production programs. LDCs clearly need this kind of help. But if international centers undertake to provide it on a large scale, I fear their research programs will sooner or later be adversely affected. And while I think there are alternative ways of providing assistance in strengthening the research services of LDCs, I do not see any alternatives to international centers at this time in conducting certain kinds of research that I view as critical. If, for example, institutional development programs in LDCs had seriously interfered at IRRI with the development of IR 26, I would say that IRRI's priorities were wrong. I think there are other ways of assisting LDCs with the development of their agricultural research services and with programs designed to accelerate food production based on production technology. But I do not see any organization, other than IRRI, I think might have developed IR 26 by even the year 2000. When I say this I do not mean to imply that IRRI scientists, bright though they are, are geniuses or even brighter than many other scientists. I am merely saying that IRRI is organized, staffed, financed and managed in such a way that the IR 26 type of operation is possible.

If the agricultural research services of LDCs are to be materially strengthened in the next 20 years, they are going to require substantial outside assistance in the form of (1) money and (2) men. Despite the recent action by Congress turning down Bob McNamara's request for additional funds for IBRD-IDA, I still think it likely that money to help strengthen agricultural research and increase food production in LDCs will be easier to mobilize than men of the kind and in the numbers that are needed. And if the past 20 years have demonstrated anything in the field of technical assistance in agriculture, it is that money without men who know how to use it wisely is usually money down the drain.

Where are the organizations that are going to take responsibility for recruiting the necessary professional staff and doing the thousand and one chores that are necessary to assist LDCs in strengthening their research services and soup up their food production programs?

RF has provided a great deal of assistance of this kind in the past. RF's activities have been extremely important not only in identifying what needed to be done but in demonstrating how to do it. Although I have not discussed the matter with you, I have heard via the grapevine that RF plans to greatly reduce -- or perhaps close out -- its technical assistance programs in agriculture in individual developing countries. If so, this important source of assistance is no longer available.

During the 1950s and 1960s, land grant colleges and universities in the United States provided a great deal of technical assistance in LDCs under contracts financed by USAID. Among other things, these programs provided help in organizing, developing and strengthening agricultural research and extension services, particularly in agricultural universities. I have not checked but I have the impression that most USAID-financed university contracts in LDCs having to do with agriculture have been closed out. If so, this raises two questions.

First, are U.S. land grant colleges and universities willing to take on new technical assistance contracts in agriculture in LDCs if the necessary financing is forthcoming? Secondly, if they are, is USAID, IBRD-IDA or some other organization or organizations willing to put up the necessary money? If the answer to either question is no, it follows that a large number of qualified institutions previously willing to take on institutional and program development contracts in agriculture in LDCs are no longer in the field.

It is my understanding that IBRD-IDA has itself assembled the manpower necessary to staff the agricultural program it is financing in Spain. Does this mean that IBRD-IDA is willing to take on additional operations of this kind providing not only the financing but the necessary staff? If not, we are in a position where IBRD-IDA may enter the field with substantial sums of money to finance technical assistance programs in agriculture in LDCs, thus creating a substantial increase in demand for technical assistance services, but without adding to the potential supply of such services.

It has always seemed to me that in theory FAO was the organization that ought to be up to its ears in technical assistance programs aimed at increasing the research competence of LDCs and in programs designed to help accelerate food production programs in these countries. I have little personal knowledge of FAO operations but most of what I have heard concerning them has not been flattering. Is there a chance that under pressure for funds to maintain its current level of operations FAO might be induced to enter the field under discussion and to pull up its socks and do an acceptable job? In any case, I understand from Colin that Peter Oram is going to discuss FAO's role, or possible role, in this field at Bellagio.

I have almost no knowledge of the programs of bilateral aid agencies, other than USAID, in the field of technical assistance in agriculture in LDCs. I assume ODA and other foreign bilateral aid agencies have recruited professional staff primarily from among their own nationals. To what extent professionals from developed countries other than the United States have been recruited for service in LDCs but financed with U.S. funds, I do not know. Nor do I know the extent, if any, to which U.S. nationals have served on projects financed by foreign bilateral aid agencies.

This brings me to pressures, present and prospective, real or imaginary, on international centers to provide what I would call institutional development assistance in connection with agricultural research services in LDCs and assistance with accelerated food production programs as contrasted with research assistance.

January 25, 1974

As I said at the outset, I have been increasingly concerned about the present and prospective volume and nature of requests for institutional development assistance that appear to be headed toward international centers. Donor agencies with money, including private foundations, like to contract with international centers because of their professional and operational competence. Pressures from this source are difficult to resist when the donors concerned are helping finance the operations of the center from which assistance is requested. To make matters even more difficult for center management, center trustees are sometimes nationals of LDCs seeking center assistance.

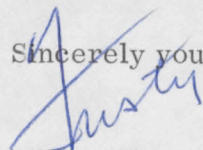
When I was at IITA in November, Jim Moomaw had before him for consideration 11 assistance projects in 9 different countries. It was estimated that if all of these contracts were to be signed, between 30 and 35 professionals would have to be recruited to staff them. This would constitute a whale of an operation in itself, particularly in Africa where trained personnel to provide simple backstopping services for professionals is difficult to come by. Although I did not go through the contract proposals with Jim, I came away with the impression that a number of them were primarily concerned with institutional development rather than research. I do not question the need for the assistance requested. I do question whether IITA should undertake to provide assistance of this kind except, perhaps, on a very small scale and in unusual circumstances. If a center, of course, provides any of it, the line will be hard to hold.

Now I come back to your discussion paper. If a careful review of the field makes it clear that there is likely to be more money available for institutional development in connection with agricultural research and food production programs in LDCs than there are organizations available to manage the money effectively without putting undue pressure on international centers to enter the field in a large way, then I think alternative(s), including the one you have suggested, should be explored with care and in detail.

I will not undertake in this letter, which is already too long, to raise some of the operational questions I think we might talk about in connection with your proposal. I think it is a workable one although, needless to say, its sponsorship and the way it is financed raise questions of crucial importance.

Again, my sincere apologies for having delayed so long in commenting on your paper. As you can see, it put me through a long series of mental gymnastics which was perhaps good for my soul but hard on my mental apparatus.

Sincerely yours,



F.E. Hill

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