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Underdeveloped Areas

MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Dean Rusk

December 7, 1954

From: John D. Rockefeller, 3rd

Subject: The Rockefeller Foundation Program -
Underdeveloped Areas

The importance of the underdeveloped areas of the world is generally and increasingly realized. This importance is partly due to the vastness of the population, the extent of the natural resources, and the potential market offered. It is partly because in many instances governments are weak and unstable and there is a lack of trained and experienced personnel and "know how"; partly because there is an undertone of sensitivity, insecurity and suspicion among leaders which makes it difficult for the Western world to work with them; and partly because of Communist activities to win the areas. Such activities in the past were almost entirely focused on subversion and force while today the cultural and economic approaches are being employed to a greater extent.

It is becoming more and more obvious that the underdeveloped areas will play an increasingly important part in the peace and security of the world. If they are to remain on the side of democracy, we must show them that they can more fully and effectively attain the better life to which they rightfully aspire by working with the democracies than under Communist aegis. As Mr. Sayed Amjad Ali, the Ambassador from Pakistan, said in New York recently, "An empty freedom under which poverty and disease prevail cannot stand up to the lure of economic betterment even if its promise is accompanied by political slavery."

Many agencies have been attempting to render assistance to the underdeveloped areas. These include American governmental agencies such as MSA, TCA, and FOA; international agencies such as FAO, WHO and the Colombo Plan; and private organizations such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. Experience has indicated that for many and differing reasons the program of the private agency has a much readier acceptance, generally speaking, than that of the governmental agency. Also the private agency has a very real advantage in the shaping and development of its program because it has greater flexibility of action, can make long term commitments, and can generally attract higher quality personnel. Because the problems of the underdeveloped countries are so great there is no question, however, that there is a need for the work of both government and private agencies.

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Over the years the program of the Rockefeller Foundation has been spelled out in terms of certain of the disciplines and in terms of specific subjects. The purpose of this memorandum is to suggest that the underdeveloped areas as such be added as a program area. Obviously all of the Foundation's funds could be spent in very short order in such a program; hence it is essential that such aid as might be rendered to the underdeveloped areas be on a highly selective basis. In this connection it might also be helpful to think of the strategic factor in relation to the area under consideration as well as the factor of underdevelopment.

The purpose of suggesting the underdeveloped areas as an item in program is in order that the officers may be in a position to pursue an opportunistic approach. So often a small item may have tremendous value and psychological effect if the officers are free to pursue it. Take for example the very imaginative suggestion of the Humanities Division concerning special grants to young leaders in Indonesia who would not qualify under the regular fellowship program. While many opportunities in the underdeveloped areas will tie in under other existing Foundation programs, the areas are so important that the officers should be encouraged in their approach to them to find out-of-program items. Such items become regularized and the officers know that they have the full support of the trustees if the program does include a heading "Underdeveloped Areas".

There is no question that a program focused on the underdeveloped areas does have a risk factor -- risk involved through instability of government, risk as to the quality of the results obtained. The Rockefeller Foundation can afford to take such risks. The officers of the Foundation have the vision and the courage to see the significant opportunities.

There is no question that the pioneer factor is involved in a program for these areas. Also there is no question that the well-being of mankind throughout the world would be involved in a fundamental way. At the same time the interests of our country would be served.