

Chapter 6

# Applying the Lessons: The Agency **for International Development**

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## IN BRIEF . . .

The experiences of the past 10 years have taught important lessons about how technologies are combined and applied in development programs and projects. Four problems stand out: the lack of effective participation by the intended recipients of the assistance; the inadequacy of a short-term, product-oriented approach; the complexity of project design; and the inappropriateness of much of the research conducted to support development efforts. Although more appropriate technologies and better development methods are essential if future efforts in the Sahel are to be more effective than those of the past, it is equally important to ensure that the policy environment is supportive. Low priority for agriculture, inappropriate cereals policy, constraints on the private sector, and the need for fiscal reform have all hindered development. Appropriate policy reform alone is not sufficient to obtain food security for the people of the Sahel, but it is a necessary part of the process.

The challenge for future development efforts in the Sahel is to move to new modes of assistance that are more consistent with the nature of the Sahel and the long-range goals of food security, environmental stabilization, and economic growth. The United States can continue to play a key role in this multinational development effort if it can incorporate the past decade's experiences into a more effective strategy. Chapter 6 examines how AID has responded to the lessons learned in the past decade in the Sahel. Highlights of the chapter include:

- The most recent revision of AID's Sahel development strategy (1984) shares many basic Club/CILSS goals and it has incorporated many of the lessons learned in the past decade. It places priority on agricultural research and production, policy reform, health and family planning, training, infrastructure, and environmental protection. It also calls for continued coordination of all donor and Sahelian programs.
- AID has not seriously addressed the issues of effective farmer and herder participation or given adequate attention to the importance of women in Sahelian agricultural systems. To date, the gap between rhetoric and reality is substantial.
- AID's effectiveness in applying the lessons of the past decade faces constraints in four areas: 1) the ambiguity of AID's regional Sahel strategy, 2) internal institutional characteristics of AID, 3) the nature of AID's relationship to Congress, and 4) the lack of agreement about the role of development assistance in overall U.S. foreign policy.
- These problems are not unique to the Sahel—they diminish the effectiveness of many AID activities—but they are particularly acute in the Sahel because of the level and special multinational characteristics of the U.S. commitment there.

## INCORPORATING THE LESSONS

### Evolving Strategies

The United States was a major actor in developing the multinational Club/CILSS framework and has continued to play an active role in the evolution of its strategies. The Agency for International Development's (AID) Sahel Development Program objectives and strategies have largely paralleled those of the Club/CILSS. A 1976 AID proposal to Congress outlined a broad, phased approach to obtaining increased food security and building a foundation for long-term growth in the Sahel. AID concluded:

While the return of normal rains in 1974 helped overcome the immediate emergency, it was clear that this region could not return to its traditional system and hope to survive. Food production had to be modernized, Traditional livestock systems, which existed on otherwise unprofitable lands, had to be modified to permit greater conservation of the rangelands. Indeed, whole new farming systems need to be introduced so that farmers could afford to benefit from more of the advantages of modernization. Only in this way could the area become capable of meeting its own basic needs for food and development (133).

Under the proposed program, the short-term phase of the strategy, 1976 to 1980, was to include immediate application of existing technologies in crop production, protection, and storage; use of information from small-scale efforts in larger integrated rural development, dryland farming, regional range management, and livestock production projects; infrastructure studies; health care and training programs; studies to prepare longer term, river basin development projects; and training and institution-building. The medium-term phase, 1980 to 1990, was to focus on expanding the productive capacity of dryland farmers, adding new technologies, expanding commercial activity, and continuing preparation for the long-term projects. The final phase, 1990 and onward, would tap the larger resources of the region, particularly the river basins, in a move toward food self-sufficiency and self-sustaining economic growth.

To support this strategy, AID developed a broad, multisector project portfolio in each of the Sahelian countries and was actively involved in the development of the Club and regional institutions such as CILSS and the Senegal, Gambia, and Niger River Basin development organizations. Projects in agricultural research and extension, crop protection, livestock and range management, integrated rural development, forestry, health, small-scale irrigation, and river basin development predominated. Training, much of it at U.S. universities, was a major component of many projects.

The experiences and lessons AID learned in the Sahel in implementing that program are similar to those of the larger Club/CILSS experience.<sup>1</sup> Through experience, AID learned that much of its short- and medium-term strategy was based on inaccurate technical and institutional assumptions. The "extension" focus of most projects failed for want of appropriate technologies or of effective systems to deliver them to farmers and herders. AID came to recognize the shortcomings of complex design through experiences in integrated rural development projects in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Senegal. Though many experts still believe its response was inadequate, AID has been a leader in emphasizing the long-term danger of the environmental problems in the Sahel and was active in reforestation and conservation. This taught many lessons about the difficulty and high cost of large-scale approaches and spurred the increased use of pilot community forestry and agro-forestry alternatives. AID also was active in highlighting the issues of recurrent costs and cereal policies. Although AID has remained active in the Club/CILSS process, its original enthusiasm and active support, particularly for CILSS, has moderated following that organization's less-than-hoped-for record. AID instead has shifted its attention to bilateral approaches.

<sup>1</sup>See the executive summary of AID's 1983 SDP evaluation (app. F).

The specific impact of AID's Sahel Development Program (SDP) is difficult to separate from the overall multidonor effort. Although AID's participation in the Club/CILSS framework was influential, AID programs represent less than 10 percent of all donor assistance to the Sahel.<sup>3</sup> AID's record in individual country programs and projects is similar to that of the entire donor community. Overall, AID projects often have fallen short of their objectives but they have not done significantly better or worse than others. There have been some accomplishments, but AID has shared in a general failure in livestock and rangeland management, dryland farming, and integrated rural development. It has been most successful in aspects of training, socioeconomic data collection, reforestation, rural health, and though the final impacts are yet to be seen, in recent agricultural research and policy reform efforts. Like its partners in the Sahel effort, many of AID's greatest accomplishments have been the lessons it has learned about the nature of the development challenge and about identifying the issues that donors and recipients in the Sahel must address for the future.

### AID's Revised Sahel Strategy

In 1984, AID modified its Sahel strategy to respond to a series of internal and external evaluations. The "Fiscal Year 1986 Country Development Strategy Statement"<sup>3</sup> for the Sahel explicitly attempts to incorporate the lessons of the past decade's experiences (125). Consistent with other major donor thinking, the strategy speaks of food "self-reliance" -the goal of meeting food needs through a combination of production and trade, rather than food "self-sufficiency" as had earlier been the goal for the multinational effort. The revised strategy statement embodies several additional modifications:<sup>4</sup>

- an increased role for economic stabilization and policy reform using policy dialog, Economic Support Funds, or Public Law-480 resources;
- a continued emphasis on increased food production as the primary goal but new effort to ensure that other activities (such as health, education, and forestry) are consistent with and complement strategies to increase food availability;
- an increased priority for research (especially in agriculture, forestry, livestock, water management, and the environment) in recognition of the inadequacies of existing technologies;
- a decrease in livestock programs for pastoral production systems;
- a cautious but systematic approach to irrigation development focusing on small-scale systems and rehabilitation of existing systems;
- an increased importance given to the role of the private sector; and
- more focused project portfolios with fewer sectors and fewer pre-jects.

These and the other provisions of AID's new strategy are consistent with the conclusions drawn by other Sahel authorities from the past decade's experiences. But more detailed analysis of the Sahel strategy and AID's subsequent submissions to Congress raise questions about the extent to which several aspects of the SDP have actually incorporated the lessons of the past decade. Several important issues are inadequately addressed in the statement and the manner in which others are to be implemented is left ambiguous.

### A Return to Trickle Down?

AID's current strategy for the Sahel focuses on creating a better "environment" for development programs to work. It includes increased financial incentives to Sahelian governments to support policy reform, for example, to soften the impact of things such as urban food price increases, with the hope that the ultimate impact of the reforms will "trickle down" to benefit the entire population. The strategy also calls for programs to increase local productive ca-

<sup>3</sup>The United States has, however, contributed 26 percent of all food aid and 16 percent of total donor effort in dryland agriculture. (See table A-4 in app. A.)

<sup>4</sup>This document is actually a regional development strategy statement but the cover title of the document was incorrectly printed as the Sahel "Country" Development Strategy Statement.

<sup>5</sup>The executive summary of the 1984 strategy is contained in a D11. E



Photo credit: U.S. Peace Corps

Policy reforms are an important part of AID's revised Sahel development strategy. One goal is to ensure that marketplace food prices reward farmers adequately.

capacity through infrastructure and institution-building activities and increased research in a wide range of sectors.

The way such "constraint removing" development strategies are organized, however, can have very different impacts on the lives of the poor majority which AID is directed by Congress to help. Is the new AID strategy a departure from existing strategies that focus on direct assistance to the poor? Which prices are to be adjusted? Whose standard of living will be maintained? Which institutions are to be supported, which roads built, which crops researched? Each of these questions illustrates the type of critical choices that can have very different impacts on the poor. Is the focus to improve the development "environment" pri-

marily to increase aggregate economic production rather than reduce poverty? Neither the consensus of development experts nor the lessons learned in the past indicate that it is desirable to return to the "trickle down" development theories of the 1960s. But AID's Sahel strategy lacks guidance on this issue and bolsters fears that the current administration's aid policies are a general retreat from assistance to the poor (88).

#### The Role of the Farmer and Herder

The AID strategy document continues to direct activities toward small agriculturalists and mentions the need for greater farmer participation in research and other activities, but it is unclear about how the role of those farmers

is to be defined or about which farmers are to be included. The crucial strategy question of how to balance the search for higher economic production with greater equity is not addressed or even acknowledged as a problem. There is no mention of the demonstrated importance of gender analysis as an essential element in all project activities. The call for farmer and herder participation can mean many different things and in AID's Sahel strategy its meaning is unclear. While the strategy acknowledges the efficiency of traditional production systems, there is no discussion of how those traditional technologies could be better integrated in future technology development and diffusion.

### Addressing the Issues

The AID strategy fails to address many of the critical issues identified in the previous chapter. How are increasingly scarce resources to be allocated between irrigation and dryland agriculture, between food and export crops, be-

tween different ecological zones or socioeconomic groups? How should the livestock sector be approached? How are population issues to be addressed? What pattern of international trade relations should the Sahelian States pursue and what portion of food security should be filled by trade? SDP officials in Washington and the field recognize the importance of these issues but the strategy does not give high priority to their resolution. Each issue involves choices which, by their nature, must be made by Sahelians. But donors, collectively and individually, have a responsibility within the Club/CILSS partnership to help in the data collection and analysis necessary to support these choices.

### Setting U.S. Priorities

AID's strategy supports the overall goal of increased food production, but provides no guidelines for setting priorities within that goal. While claiming that AID is narrowing the range



*Photo credit U S Peace Corps*

AID's strategy for development in the Sahel leaves some critical issues unresolved, for example, how the United States will assist herders,

of projects under SDP and withdrawing from sectors where its expertise or management capability has proven too limited, the strategy statement does not indicate what those areas are or how they are to be determined. The list of critical areas provided in the program's 1985 report to Congress is extensive and does not indicate a narrowing of focus. The United States has strengths in water resource development, socioeconomic data collection and analysis, macroeconomic policy analysis, agroclimatology, research methodologies, forestry, fisheries, food processing, and other areas needed in the Sahel. A more systematic matching of those strengths with specific program priorities would enhance the AID strategy.

#### Lack of a Systematic Approach

Setting priorities is clearly important, but so is establishing links among the components.

While addressing the need for activities in every sector to be consistent with the goal of increased food production, the strategy itself fails to integrate its discussion of sector activities into a systematic whole. The absence of adequate emphasis on the interrelatedness of activities at both the national and the farm level could lead to a continuation of the unconnected program approaches of the past. There is a particular need to take advantage of the opportunities and flexibility provided by "program assistance" such as Economic Support Funds, food aid, and more general technical assistance to complement project activities. More effective integration of food aid into global agricultural sector strategies is essential.

## IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

AID's new strategy contains inherent ambiguities that could potentially create problems and inconsistencies as it is implemented. The impact of the new strategy will depend on how it is implemented. Many elements suggested in chapter 4 and embodied in AID's new strategy have been part of AID's professed strategies since the beginning of the Sahel effort. The importance of farmer participation, the need to look at agricultural productivity in the context of environmental sustainability, the key variable of "risk perception" among farmers, the importance of institutional development and others are to be found in program descriptions, project documents, and evaluations throughout the 1970s. While AID, like other donors, has been gaining experience and expertise, the gap between stated strategies and actual performance—between rhetoric and reality—is often wide.

AID officials and observers frequently suggest that the key to increasing AID's effectiveness in the Sahel is less a question of refining

its strategies than of removing the obstacles that block those strategies from becoming viable programs and projects. Observers both inside and outside AID identify several institutional characteristics that may partly explain the gap between strategy and implementation. Although these factors are interrelated, they can be categorized into those specific to AID internally, those that are the product of AID's relationship with Congress, and those more generally related to AID's role within U.S. foreign policy.

#### The Internal AID Context

Characteristics internal to AID that observers feel constrain its effectiveness in the Sahel include staff issues, factors that limit direct contact with farmers, elements of its programming and project design systems, and tensions between centralized and decentralized decision-making.

## Staff

AID staff in the Sahel has been limited in both quantity and quality. In 1974, only Senegal and Niger had full AID missions and only 25 American staff served the entire region. By 1978, that number expanded to 96 and by 1984 there were 130 direct-hire American positions (125,134). But despite the speed with which AID missions grew, inadequate staffing of field missions was still cited as a major cause for the failure of food production projects (127). Contrary to the recommendations of internal audits, staff levels in most Sahel missions have been reduced and plans call for further reductions. Not only have staff shortages affected AID's effectiveness, but the prospects of further reductions could preclude the more labor-intensive analysis and ongoing management required for participatory and institution-building activities. Staff shortages could force the agency to emphasize programs with fewer management demands (e.g., economic stabilization, infrastructure, and agricultural projects in more accessible, better-watered areas) rather than basing those decisions on considerations related to implementing its strategy,

The lack of appropriate skills and Sahel-specific experience of many AID technicians and programmers involved in the development of AID's early Sahel programs were factors in the design errors of those programs. The lack of Sahel-specific expertise was particularly constraining:

AID's development effort initially had little information and understanding of the physical, institutional, and policy environment in which economic improvement was to take place (125).

U.S. expertise in arid land agricultural technologies proved largely inapplicable for technical and socioeconomic reasons, though many mistakes were made before this was realized. Much of AID's Sahel staff is trained in general program areas rather than in specific technical fields. The proportion of generalists within

AID is rising and technicians complain that they have little input into major decisions,

The lack of French-speaking programmers and technicians has compounded the staffing problem, resulting in: 1) major communication problems with Sahelian partners, 2) coordination difficulties with other donors, and 3) difficulty in using the wealth of experience and data collected by the French during the century of their presence in West Africa,

AID direct-hire staff are only a part of the total personnel that AID uses in its Sahel operations. A variety of contractors (individuals, universities, consulting firms, and private voluntary organizations) perform tasks ranging from logistical support to the design, implementation, and evaluation of AID projects. While the use of contract personnel has increased the pool of skills available to AID, it does not necessarily resolve staffing problems. Contract personnel, particularly early on, did not have significantly greater Sahel experience or French skills than did AID direct-hire staff. Costs are high (between \$100,000 to **\$150,000** per year for each contractor) and outside personnel answer to institutions that often have different objectives and agendas (65). More importantly, the use of short-term outside consultants reduces institutional learning within AID and can limit the use of integrated strategies.

AID also hires local staff, but this pool of expertise is poorly tapped. Local staff often are the informal institutional memory of AID missions, but they are usually occupied with routine work and are infrequently used to help with program development and management. This wastes the potential their special perspective could offer and misses an opportunity to increase their skills in a form of internal institution-building,

A decade of experience in the Sahel has greatly improved American expertise within AID, in universities, and among consultants. The village-level work experience of the Peace Corps has proven an effective training ground. But the turnover inherent in 2-year tours and



the division of responsibilities between direct-hire and contract personnel have inhibited consistent institutional learning. The lack of ability to speak French continues to be a problem, partly because U.S. universities have been experiencing declines in French language study. Also, U.S. universities not only appear to be experiencing declines in enrollment in agriculturally related programs (with the possible exception of agricultural economics) but the training they provide is relevant to U.S. agricultural systems. Thus AID is likely to face a continuing problem obtaining a future supply of appropriately trained staff for the Sahel program.

#### Contact With Farmers and Herders

A strong need for a high degree of dialog between donors and Sahelians exists at every level. Cultural and linguistic barriers, far beyond French language skills, face AID staff and contractors in the pursuit of that dialog. While dialog is difficult enough at the level of national development agencies, the communication gap increases at the village level where the official languages (French, English, or Portuguese) are rarely spoken and where cultural differences are the greatest. In addition to linguistic and cultural skills, such a dialog requires desire, time, and a broad, open-minded perspective.

Institutional dynamics within AID limit the extent and effectiveness of contacts with farmers and herders. Staff shortages, limited travel budgets, and overburdening paperwork are seen as particularly important in limiting contacts. The lifestyle of most members of the official donor community, the majority of whom live in prosperous enclaves within capital cities, increases the perceptual gap between them and the rural poor (19). Some Europeans in the Sahel feel that AID mission personnel are unnecessarily cut off not only from farmers but also from government officials, "They tend to keep to themselves," was a comment made by several otherwise sympathetic observers,

#### Weakness in Program and Project Design Processes

Over the years, AID has developed a complex system for determining its strategies and

designing its programs and projects. Some aspects of these systems limit the potential for the type of long-term, integrated, flexible programming needed in the Sahel. OTA has identified weaknesses in six areas:

1. **Project Selection:** The method by which AID develops individual country strategies may not provide the kind of micro-level data collection and analysis needed to select good projects.
2. **Analytical Skills:** High level analytical skills to do the economic, environmental, or social analysis called for in program design are often lacking. As a result, "formula" solutions are substituted in place of country-specific programming. The diversity and complexity of the Sahel is often overlooked.
3. **Organization of Components:** Sectoral analysis and project identification, design, approval, and implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation, are performed by different groups and individuals, and increasingly by contractors external to AID. While there are benefits from different perspectives and independent monitoring and evaluation, the lack of connection between stages in a project leads to inconsistency and lack of accountability, especially among those responsible for program and project design. The separation is mirrored in AID's Washington management structure. Technical support, program, evaluation, and budgeting are located in different offices (even in different buildings), with insufficient coordination among them.
4. **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Poor linkage exists between evaluation activities and other parts of the system, so the lessons of failure and success are often not used to modify programs or design new activities. Evaluation tends to take an "audit" approach based on narrowly defined and quantifiable objectives rather than on questions of broader impact. In principle all projects include ongoing monitoring, but in practice these receive insufficient resources. By the time problems are discovered, it is often too late to correct them (1 27) often making project management, in fact,

crisis management. Furthermore, evaluations have been used more to identify failures than to document reasons for successes. They are not used sufficiently by the agency to institutionalize learning.

5. Timing: Despite efforts to improve the situation, projects often are not implemented until 3 years after their initial identification. In the meantime, many of the important assumptions and agreements on which they were based may no longer be valid. The lack of design flexibility makes adaptation to changes difficult.
6. Project Design: During the early phase of SDP, AID reward structures were oriented to large program size and rapid obligation of funds. Long-time, AID observers bemoan the fact that AID still favors the designer and the obligator of funds over the project implementor and manager. The result is a bias toward large-scale, complex projects, with inadequate attention to field realities or management capabilities within AID or the host country.

A 1983 survey of Sahel AID missions reported that design problems contributed to project difficulties in 24 of 25 projects. Two-thirds of the projects were judged to have been overly ambitious (128). The size and complexity of projects was identified as one of six reasons for the failure or poor performance of all seven food production projects studied in another internal AID audit (127).

#### Regional Strategy v. Country Programs

When SDP began, the concept of a coordinated, long-term, subregionally focused program with a separate budget and management was new to AID. It was controversial from the start and it highlighted the already problematic relationship between Washington and the field. Some AID Sahel field staff feel that AID is overly centralized in its decisionmaking. Attempts to mold country programs to correspond with a regional strategy, particularly in the early days, exacerbated that problem. What does a regional strategy signify? What is its relationship to AID's Africa strategy? How should the

individual country staff participate in the elaboration of the regional strategy? To what extent and by what mechanisms were individual country programs to be made consistent with that strategy? What would be the balance between resource allocation to regional activities as opposed to country programs? The answer to each of these questions has varied over the course of SDP's history,

Tensions between the individual field missions and regional management have existed from the program's beginning. To many in the field, even though SDP was the basis for creating AID missions in the Sahel it was basically a Washington and Paris-based idea that never became a reality to the missions. It was fairly idealistic and early SDP-generated regional projects often bore little relationship to the AID mission directors' perception of country needs. While the regional approach to programming is appealing in theory, it is difficult in practice. Country mission staff worked with national governments that were often less than enthusiastic about shifting resources to regional organizations. AID missions in the Sahel are under the supervision of ambassadors whose mandates are national, not regional and who, because the United States had few other interests in the countries, often became much more involved in AID programming than ambassadors elsewhere.

Several aspects of AID's regional Sahel approach have been downplayed in the past 4 years. Contrary to the recommendations of the 1983 SDP assessment, AID has disbanded the multidisciplinary regional planning team, based in Bamako, Mali, that was charged with providing support to country missions and with spearheading the formulation of regional strategies. The proportion of regional programs (versus bilateral) within the Sahel budget has dropped from 40 percent in the early 1980s to under 30 percent in 1985 and is projected to decline further over the next 4 years (125). Much of the funding for river basin development is being folded back into bilateral accounts.

The decision to lessen the regional nature of SDP has been based on what AID considers an important lesson of the past decade. To a large

extent, this decision reflects greater realism about the limitations of regional development efforts. But, to a lesser extent AID risks losing some of the potential that the regional perspective and the Club/CILSS framework have in making the most effective use of all donor resources. While stressing the continuing importance of international coordination through the Club/CILSS framework and related structures, AID has pulled back from active support of African regional institutions. AID's current approach is to "think regionally while implementing programs nationally" given that power and sovereignty continue to rest in the nation States (125),

How much these changes are changes of approach rather than changes in the level of commitment to the Sahel or to the multinational nature of the Sahel effort is unclear. They are, however, consistent with other changes in U.S. foreign assistance, which is generally moving toward increased bilateralism (88). U.S. criticisms of CILSS have been important in that organization's recent reform. Continued U.S. support is needed to maximize those gains and to facilitate the limited but positive potential role that CILSS has to play.

### Constraints on the Congress-AID Relationship

A second set of institutional factors that limit AID's effectiveness in implementing its Sahel strategy involves the manner in which AID and Congress work together. It includes the effects of a generally poor working relationship between the two and the specific mechanisms by which Congress tries to influence AID's policies. The formulation of the U.S. commitment to the Sahel began in a close working relationship between Congress and AID (37). That partnership has not, however, translated into a sustained, working relationship in the implementation of the Sahel program. Once the commitment was made, relations with Congress regarding SDP have been largely consistent with the pattern of Congress-AID relations generally—a relationship that both sides have described as ineffective and, at times, bordering on the adversarial.

The timeframe and cost of the original U.S. commitment to the Sahel was not universally supported in AID or in Congress. In order to gain its acceptance, the concept was presented with expectations for dramatic short-term results. Unrealistic congressional expectations were in part the result of mistaken assumptions about the availability of technologies but they are also in part due to the language in which the Sahel program had been presented. In the words of AID field staff: "the program was certainly oversold."

Some authorities speculate that the lack of more effective communication and the systematic overselling of AID programs in justifying its budget works against Congress developing a more sophisticated understanding of the long-term nature of the development process and this ultimately generates unattainable goals for AID field staff. The problematic relationship between Congress and AID inhibits the impact the United States has in achieving Club/CILSS goals. Short-term funding cycles, multiple policy mandates, procurement and financial regulations, and the conflicts created from divided congressional responsibilities on matters that affect the Sahel all contribute to the lack of effectiveness.

### Funding

SDP receives funds as part of the annual congressional appropriation for foreign assistance. Lack of a strong domestic constituency for foreign assistance and the complexity of the foreign appropriations bill, which includes funding for a broad range of military and economic assistance programs, multilateral agencies, and other U.S. programs operating abroad, and the controversial nature of many of these elements, have made it difficult to pass funding bills. In 7 out of the last 9 years, funding has been through stop-gap continuing resolutions. Annual budget cycles inhibit achieving consistency and the long-range strategies required for effective programs in the Sahel.

In principle, the major advantages of the SDP portions of Sahel funding<sup>5</sup> are the fact that

<sup>5</sup>This does not include Economic Support Funds or Public Law-480 resources which are funded separately.

they have been appropriated on a “no-year” basis, i.e., once authorized they do not have to be obligated that fiscal year, and funds cannot be reassigned to other programs except for disaster assistance. The defensive relationship with Congress, however, has given rise to fears within AID management that future funding will be reduced unless appropriated funds are spent quickly. As a result, AID has chosen not to use the no-year funding provision. The yearly budget cycle puts added pressure on AID to produce quick results to justify continuing funding levels. The overall effect of the budget process is thus biased toward short funding cycles, quick obligations, and short-term projects.

### Mutiple Mandates

Overall policy guidance on the objectives and focus of U.S. foreign assistance programs are embodied in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. A substantial amendment in 1973 defined the “New Directions” for foreign assistance that called on AID to focus its development assistance programs on the poor majorities in the poorest developing countries. While the new policy eventually did have a major impact on AID programming, Congress/AID dialog on these New Directions has not been easy (137). It has been complicated by a series of amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act that have mandated a succession of additional, more specific new policy directions such as women in development, family planning, infant survival, the use of private voluntary organizations, the environment, capital-saving technology, and others.

AID’s attempts to appear responsive to these directives have led to frequently changing priorities. Succeeding administrations, seeking to place their own stamp on foreign assistance programs, have added additional and at times contradictory directives to the field. As new mandates have been added, the old ones remain and confusion about the direction of programming grows. Field staff see the problem not in the correctness of any individual policy approach but rather in the rapidity with which the policies have changed. These changing signals disrupt programs that by their nature re-

quire longer term, reasonably stable commitments. Policy mandates also act to diminish local flexibility to adapt programming to specific local needs and host country priorities.

### @procurement and Financial Controls

The procurement and financial controls placed on AID by Congress have also constrained AID’s operations. The general requirement to use U.S.-produced equipment and other project inputs is a particularly sore spot in the Sahel. For historical as well as geographical reasons, most of the Sahel’s trade ties are to France and Europe. Congressionally mandated AID requirements to use American equipment have proven ineffective in stimulating new markets for U.S. goods, a major objective of such measures. Meanwhile, they have complicated and even hindered project operations. Delivery time of U.S. equipment has been long and inoperative U.S. vehicles, pumps, and other equipment litter the Sahel for want of spare parts, maintenance skills, or operating funds. Medicines used in important AID village-level primary health care programs often come with doses written in English. In addition, these “buy American” requirements have led to the use of inappropriate capital-intensive technologies.

The United States is not the only donor with such requirements. Efforts at coordination in multinational project development often have been delayed and in some cases stymied by conflicting procurement regulations. The requirement by each major donor to purchase equipment at home also increases the administrative burden on the Sahelian institutions that must deal with the variety of equipment. So-called “tied aid provisions” for equipment and technical assistance have greatly increased the total cost of aid, and, from the perspective of the Sahelian recipients, greatly diminished its value to them. Again, the defensive relationship between AID and Congress has resulted in AID’s not using its authority to waive tied aid in some areas of procurement.

Financial control has always been a major area of congressional oversight on AID. The rapid expansion of aid programs in the poverty-stricken and administratively weak Sahel and

AID's inadequate field staff resulted in a predictable amount of mismanagement and some cases of misappropriation (134). In 1981, following a series of negative audits, Congress enacted a section of the Foreign Assistance Act that required the AID Administrator to determine that Sahelian countries have adequate controls over assistance funds. While the resulting measures, and particularly the accompanying efforts to improve management skills under the Sahel Regional Financial Management Project, have improved an admittedly unacceptable situation, many observers feel that they have gone too far. The strictness of the new regulations is seen to be unrealistic given current Sahelian managerial and cultural realities. It has caused set-backs in the "partnership" between U.S. and Sahelian officials, has tied up both AID and Sahelian staff in excess paperwork, and has eliminated the potential positive impact of more active participation by smaller Sahelian businesses and PVOs. While proper financial control is unquestionably important, a better balance between financial control and development objectives would facilitate AID's work in the Sahel.

#### Congressional Coordination

SDP is just one of many U.S. programs and policies that affect the Sahel. U.S. decisions on food aid, domestic agricultural price supports, trade policy, interest rates, and overseas investment, as well as positions on international debt and finance as expressed through U.S. participation in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other agencies, have varying degrees of direct or indirect impact on the Sahel. Policies affecting the value of the dollar, international cereal prices, interest rates, food aid, and debt may affect the poor of the Sahel more than development assistance. These policy areas are usually dealt with by different congressional committees where the potential conflict or complementarity with other actions regarding the Sahel is rarely considered. Although better coordination between the executive branch agencies that implement these programs and policies is crucial, better internal congressional coordination focusing on ways

to minimize "taking away with one hand what we give with the other" would greatly enhance the coherence and impact of the U.S. commitment to the region.

#### Congressional Tools for Influencing AID Policies

Congress uses a variety of methods to enforce its policy directives to AID, such as requirements for periodic written reports, congressional inquiries, legislative requirements for procurement regulations, special reports, testimony, GAO audits, and congressional notification for program or budget changes. Many AID staff feel that the major impact of congressional mandates and oversight is a substantial increase in paperwork and bureaucratic hurdles. Some estimate that they spend up to one-fourth of their time responding to congressional inquiries or fulfilling internal administrative requirements. Requirements for technical or congressional notification for minor changes in project funding or timing, while not overly burdensome, do create extra paperwork and hinder the flexible design systems needed in the Sahel. Private voluntary groups working in the Sahel and funded by AID report similar frustrations.

But AID/Washington may compound the problem by trying to anticipate Congress and by systematically going one step beyond congressional requirements. Some characterize the agency as "always looking over its shoulder" in its relationship with Congress, using field data to justify its budget requests rather than as a basis for developing its programs. They contend that the field serves Washington's needs rather than the other way around.

The impact of congressional policy mandates are often less than reported. Field staff have learned to present what they are doing in whatever terms are called for by current policy. Mandated targeting of specific groups, such as women or the rural poor, or special program considerations such as environmental impact or health, can result in tacked-on components or paragraphs in project documentation rather than concrete integration into program design.

The number of such mandates and the administrative burden they bring discourage field staff from embracing the spirit of such directions and more creatively implementing them. Stressing the uniqueness of each situation, field staff rankle at the rigidity of some measures such as current requirement that at least 12 percent of funds pass through private voluntary organizations (PVOs). AID staff did not disagree with the positive role that PVOs can play but they stressed the variability in PVO performance and in opportunities for collaborating with them. They questioned the wisdom of basing decisions on general quotas rather than on careful analysis of needs and opportunities in a specific country.

Many AID staff are frustrated that the partnership between Congress and AID that gave birth to the Sahel program in the mid-1970s has not been carried through in operations. Compared to other programs within AID, the SDP's special budgetary and management provisions and the continuing congressional interest in the Sahel are an advantage in these times of tight budgets, but that special status may be eroding. Congressional/AID relations could be a source of opportunity, but instead they are seen by many as reducing AID's ability to be effective in fulfilling the U.S. commitment.

#### Development Assistance and Foreign Policy Objectives in the Sahel

Foreign aid generally lacks strong domestic support, so U.S. development assistance is often justified in terms of U.S. "national interest." Those national interests are multiple-strategic, political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian. The interests most referred to in backing a [J. S. commitment to the Sahel are largely the last—humanitarian.

This is not to say that the expansion of the Sahel program has been without other motives. The Sahel drought was seen by some as an opportunity to make inroads into French political and economic dominance in the zone. Increasing domestic political influence among



*Photo credit: U.S. Agency for International Development*

Americans respond generously to calls for famine relief, especially when children are threatened with starvation. Broader humanitarian concerns such as long-term development assistance usually receive little public support.

black Americans also challenged the State Department and AID to take Africa more seriously and end the neglect that had characterized America's relationships with Africa. Though the benefits to U.S. firms have been lower and less permanent than hoped for, tied aid provisions and especially food aid brought sizable economic gains back to the United States. The moderate political stances of Senegal and Niger are of at least some importance. Senegal has been a particularly helpful moderating voice in African and international arenas. It has participated in peace-keeping activities in the Middle East, Zaire, and Chad. Nonetheless, the primary justification for U.S. support of SDP was built on the outpouring of public opinion following the 1967 to 1973 drought.

Since the change in administrations in 1981, the increased bilateralism in foreign assistance and its use to support U.S. political positions has led to fears that the primary basis of the U.S. development assistance to the Sahel might be changing from that of long-term develop-

ment to short-term political interests. Several AID staff members felt that in the past, the Sahel Development Program had the advantage of being insulated from most political factors. That seems to be decreasingly the case. In the 1984 Sahel Strategy Statement, political and strategic interests in Sahel are mentioned explicitly:

U.S. contact with the Sahel is compassionate but also pragmatic, the latter particularly with regard to Senegal, Niger, and Chad where we have compelling political/security interests. U.S. political concerns in these and other Sahel countries are inter-woven with numerous international and domestic factors, economic considerations and humanitarian interests. All have a bearing on the achievement of U.S. objectives in the Sahel and the Sahel Development Program has a key role to play in accomplishing these goals (125).

Though the nature of the political and security interests is not elaborated, it presumably involves growing U.S. concern with the destabilizing force of Libya in light of its troop involvement in Chad and alleged involvement with dissident groups in several Sahelian States.

In another example of the change to more political uses of AID's Sahel assistance programs, the State Department mandated cuts in project funding to the new government of Burkina Faso in 1983 following a series of pro-

nouncements and actions considered unfavorable by the United States. New funding for the Burkina Faso AID program dropped from \$11.2 million in 1982 to \$300,000 in 1984 and \$40,000 in 1985.<sup>6</sup> As part of the cut, AID canceled one of the most successful forestry projects in the Sahel. Burkina officials and donors working in Burkina Faso were disappointed and frustrated at so blatant a disruption of long-term assistance in support of short-term political objectives. The view that the United States is unreliable in its development assistance could undermine the development of effective partnerships not only with Sahelians but with the other donors within the multinational development community.

Mixing political and security considerations with developmental goals creates contradictions that often serve neither. In the Sahel, the relatively low level of security, political, and economic interests in relation to the humanitarian and the exceptionally long-term nature of the challenge make it essential to focus on development to the greatest extent possible. U.S. national interests in the Sahel are best served by effective development programs.

<sup>6</sup>These figures are for bilateral economic assistance under SDP. Food aid increased during the drought years to \$12.4 million in 1984 and \$19.6 million in 1985. The Peace Corps remained in Burkina Faso throughout this period. See tables A-6 and A-7 in app. A.