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JOHN BLUMGART

*Interviewed by: Robert MacAlister
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BA in Political Science and Economics, Oberlin University	1940s-1948
MA in Economics, Columbia University	1948-1950
U.S. Army, Second Lieutenant	1944-1945
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Internship with the United Nations	1949
American Committee on a United Europe	1950-1958
Deputy Executive Director	
Jakarta, Indonesia—Ford Foundation, Assistant Representative	1958-1960
Entered the Foreign Service	1960
Washington, D.C.—USAID Far East Bureau	1960-1965
Joined the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), precursor to USAID	
Desk Officer for Thailand	
Deputy Director of Southeast Asia Office	
La Paz, Bolivia—USAID Assistant Director for Programs	1965-1968
Provided assistance to the central government budgetary system	
Heavily involved in macroeconomic policy, problems of exchange rate and local currency, central government financial reform, taxation policy	

Bangkok, Thailand—USAID Program Officer Worked for Regional Economic Development Office Focused on Mekong River Development	1968-1970
Washington, D.C.—USAID Africa Bureau Program Office Assistant Director for Planning Assistant Director for Technical Resources Operations - designed range and livestock programs for West Africa (Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal) Chief of Special Development Projects, a division in the Office of Development Resources (specifically environment and energy programs)	1970-82
Retirement	1982
Post-retirement activities Consultant with African nations	1982-1992

INTERVIEW

[Note: Mr. Blumgart did not edit this interview before his death]

Q: This is an interview with John Blumgart, a gentleman who spent many years working for the Agency for International Development. This is Bob MacAlister asking the questions. For starters, John, I think it would be interesting to have a little bit of background on your family, education, travel, etc. before you got involved with AID. In other words, as you look back, what is there in your background that led you to get involved in international development activity?

Education and Early Interest in International Affairs

BLUMGART: I've thought about that a lot over the years. I think the most...the basic cause of achieving an interest or developing an interest in international affairs, generally, was my experience during the Second World War. Before going to college, or at the time I was going to college, I had so set my sights at becoming a teacher of American history, or a teacher of history, probably at the college level, maybe at the high school level -- I hadn't decided at that point -- and that perspective was changed as a result of going into the army, volunteering for the infantry and being sent overseas, spending six months as an unwelcome guest of the Third Reich. Coming back and going back to college and my interest had shifted materially as a result of the war experience and I found that a few things happened. One was that I was no longer as interested as I had been before in the academic life, the more contemplative teaching and research kind of work that the academic life involved. I wanted to do something more active, work for an organization or an agency that was involved in international affairs. The second point is that from being interested in history as a career goal I became much more interested in international development, international affairs at that point, not development as such. America's new

role in the world and how I could achieve a career in international affairs. And so after leaving college...well, even before that I shifted from history to political science and economics as my majors. And after leaving college...

Q: Where did you do your undergraduate work, though?

BLUMGART: Oberlin College -- a great place. Went to Columbia. At that time in American education they were just beginning to start schools of international affairs. There was one at Princeton, there was one at Columbia, there was one at Johns Hopkins. It was a discipline that was just getting started. For some reason, and I don't remember exactly why, I chose Columbia over the others and was able to get in. Perhaps because I am from New York and it would permit me to go to college and be with my relatives at the same time. Also, at the time I graduated I married my wife and she was an easterner, from the same area that I came from. So it was convenient for both of us for me to go to Columbia.

After two to three years of graduate school in international affairs and international economics I began to look for a job.

Q: All right...we are just at the point where you were finishing up your graduate work at Columbia and were starting to look for employment.

BLUMGART: I think my interest in international affairs was sharpened by the work at Columbia that I did, the graduate studies. For a time, I was enrolled in the Russian Institute at Columbia, but most of my work was done at the School of International Affairs, which at that time was under the direction of Grayson Kirk who later became President of the University. Also, I was fortunate during those years to be awarded an internship at the United Nations. The UN was then at Flushing Meadow and four of us from Columbia spent the summer at the U.N. doing various types of work to assist some of the professionals there with their activities. It gave us a chance to rub elbows with diplomats and emissaries from foreign countries and to meet the Secretariat, members of the Secretariat, and become further immersed in the whole field of international relations.

Working with the American Committee on a United Europe

After Columbia, I began to seriously look for a job where I could apply some of what I had learned because my interest in international affairs remained as keen as ever. Fortunately, one of my colleagues at Columbia had just become the Executive Director of a non-governmental organization called the American Committee on United Europe. It was a non-governmental organization, a private voluntary organization started by a group of wealthy, mostly Republicans but also some Democrats. Actually it followed the creation of the American Committee for the Marshall Plan. I think that was its linear descendant. It was headed by the former head of the Office of Strategic Services, General "Wild Bill" Donovan. It included on its Board of Directors people like Herbert Bleeman and a number of international luminaries. This very close friend of mine, who was also an intern at the UN at the same time I was, had been appointed to Executive Directorship of

the organization and he needed a deputy. He asked me whether I'd be interested. I leapt at it like a shot. In many ways it was one of the best jobs I've ever had, if not the best because it brought me in contact with all kinds of interesting people...

Q: It was based in New York City?

BLUMGART: Yes, it was based in New York City. It had a small liaison office in Paris and its major function was to raise money in the U.S. and make grants to organizations in Western Europe that were advocating European integration and Western European unification. At that time -- this was in the early 50's -- that because the organization called the Council of Europe based in Strasbourg, France. But it evolved into the Coal and Steel Community that was the inspiration of Jean Monet and Robert Schumann, the French Foreign Minister, and was very much supported by the Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul Henri Spaak. The job gave us entree with these luminaries. We made at least annual trips to Europe to visit the organizations we were helping and to meet the leaders of the Western European unification movement.

My work was to help with the fund raising, to organize lecture tours for people from Western Europe to talk to American audiences, and to help run the office. We had a modest research and publication program, which I contributed to as well. So it was really a fun job and also a great educational experience.

Q: At this point in the evolution of the European Association, were there any development implications, or economic development implications?

BLUMGART: Yeah, it had a lot of implications for the European economy and, indirectly, the American economy because it meant the integration of their economies with each other and the barriers to trade came down as economic activity became more and more supra-national. It permitted the Europeans the flexibility and freedom that they couldn't achieve on a purely national basis. It had the effect that expanding markets have on the economy, at least that was the intention and that was how it worked out.

At the same time, of course, we were involved in the Marshall Plan, which obviously had economic development implications. But the basic aim was to help Western Europe to fend for itself after the calamity of the Second World War, and to integrate Germany into a greater entity with France and Italy and the Benelux countries, and to take one step away from the bipolar international political regime that had sprung up as a result of the end of the Second World War. The United States of America being a power and very few powers of any consequence in comparison.

Q: What was your next career step after contributing to European consultation?

Assignment in Indonesia with the Ford Foundation

BLUMGART: Well, after that my next major step was to get a job with the Ford Foundation. That changed my career from primarily in international affairs and a political

and diplomatic focus to economic development because the Ford Foundation at that time had a major foreign assistance program of its own, particular in the 50's and early 60's.

Q: Was this in New York or overseas, John?

BLUMGART: Well, I was hired by the New York office to be their assistant representative in Jakarta, Indonesia. That was a wonderful job. It took May and I to Indonesia; it was our first overseas job experience. Working for the Ford Foundation was a real challenge because it was small and you had a limited staff and you had a lot of discretion and you didn't have layers of bureaucracy to go through to get support or get turned down, whichever way it went. It was very flexible and the quality of the people who worked there was very high so it was a lot of fun to be in that situation.

The program was mostly in education, some in agriculture but mostly in education. The programs that I was involved in were with three faculties of economics at three of the universities there. One was a private university in Sumatra and the other two were public universities, one in Jakarta and one in Bandung. Being in Indonesia in those days was an exciting experience, too, because Sukarno was still in power and political life in Indonesia was quite dynamic, to say the least. There was the problems of the rebels in the outer islands, problems with the Chinese on the mainland, Chinese immigrants in Indonesia itself. It was a very effervescent time, which came to an end a couple of years after we left with the failed communist revolution and the assumption of the military in power.

Q: How long were you folks in Indonesia?

BLUMGART: Two years, from 1958 to 1960.

Q: And you focused very much in working with institutions of higher education in terms of your assignment?

BLUMGART: Yeah, right. We had, as I say, a small office in Jakarta. There was two other assistant representatives and a representative and that was the professional staff. We had a lot of consultants coming from academia and from other...

Q: What were your objectives of this program working with these three universities?

BLUMGART: Really to institutionalize them, to make them strong, vibrant centers of economic teaching, education and research.

Q: Why did you think that was desirable to do?

BLUMGART: Well, as it turned out, most of the economic decision makers in Indonesia came out of the program that we were supporting and the students and faculties went on to the United States to get their graduate degrees and then they came back, and many of

them rose to positions of extreme importance in the government. So, a lot of our trainees became important economic players, and still are for that matter.

Q: What happened after Indonesia?

Joins the US Foreign Assistance Program- Formation of USAID

BLUMGART: Indonesia ended in 1960 and we came home and by that time I had really become very interested in the whole development process and less in the political side of international affairs and so I set my sights for the U.S. foreign assistance program. The timing there was very good because that was just the time when the Democrats were coming into power under John F. Kennedy and he had just won the election. A strong and vigorous foreign assistance program was one of the major emphases in his campaign. So, it was a very enthusiastic and interesting time to be involved with U.S. foreign assistance because the whole agency was reorganized. There were several task forces that were put to work to reorganize the structure and the...

Q: Do you recall what the predecessor of AID was called?

BLUMGART: ICA...the International Cooperation Administration. I started work actually before AID was formed. ICA was in its final months and it was being run by the former U.S. Ambassador to Germany, James Riddleberger. Then AID was formed and Henry Labouisse became the head person at AID. Then later Fowler Hamilton replaced Labouisse. Labouisse went on to become the head of UNICEF.

Q: When you joined AID, was it in 1960, or...I shouldn't say AID, I should say ICA?

BLUMGART: Yes, ICA. Late '60.

Q: Roughly how many employees did it have, Americans, at that point. Do you recall?

BLUMGART: I don't know, Bob. At that time, AID was a different animal.

Q: How so?

BLUMGART: Well, it was basically a technical assistance agency.

Q: Is that of the Point Four heritage?

BLUMGART: Yes, yes, exactly. Point Four plus some add-ons.

Q: Could you spell out a little bit what Point Four was?

BLUMGART: Well, Point Four was taken from the fourth point of Harry Truman's his inaugural address, I guess it is, in 1948, which promised that the United States would do its best to provide technical help to improve their productivity and increase the skills of

their population. And provide technical assistance to enable economies to expand and function more effectively. So the Point Four administration started at that point. Then it evolved from a purely technical assistance agency to one that was just providing economic aid to these countries. Particularly countries that were threatened by communist influence. So, a program of support to economies that were weak and vulnerable to communist influence was added to the Point Four. In addition to that, Food for Peace became a third component to Point Four. Financial assistance in terms of loans, in terms of infrastructure, in terms of providing funds for dams and roads...the sorts of things that the World Bank is continuing to do, was separated from ICA and a new organization called the Development Loan Fund (DLF) was started. But under Kennedy when ICA went out of business, DLF went out of business too, and they merged to become AID.

Q: So, initially AID, which was established in the early 60's, was the Development Loan Fund activities plus technical assistance...?

BLUMGART: Plus technical assistance, plus grant assistance to friendly economies overseas that were threatened by communist subversion... or whom we wanted to strengthen, and food for peace.

Q: Did we have many missions overseas at that point?

BLUMGART: Yes, yes we did. One of the first meetings I went to after I joined AID was a meeting of the AID directors from the Far East because I started my career in AID in what was then called the Far East Bureau.

Q: Here in Washington.

BLUMGART: Yeah. I attended this meeting called "Meeting of the Far East Mission Chiefs" which was sort of a little droll. The meeting was presided over by Frank Coffin who, at that time, was head of the Development Loan Fund, which was being merged into AID. He was a whimsical guy and he composed a poem called "Ode to the Far East Mission Chiefs" which started the meeting off with a bang.

At that time, AID was becoming less and less Europe oriented and more and more oriented toward the developing countries.

Q: A new side of the tape...let's see...we were in the Far East Bureau where you started out, and you mentioned that AID was getting more and more involved outside of Europe. What exactly, or generally, were your responsibilities in the Far East Bureau in Washington? What were you involved with?

Assignment to Desk Officer, Thailand in USAID & Deputy for South East Asia

BLUMGART: I became the Thai desk officer... the desk officer for Thailand. When AID replaced ICA as the U.S. foreign assistance institution, a major change in structure and a

sort of philosophy took place. ICA was...that is the technical assistance aspect of ICA was run basically on a technical basis and had very strong [interruption then inaudible].

There was a reorganization that took place when AID was formed. The regional bureaus and desks seemed to be of much greater importance in developing programs.

Q: Does that imply that before that...where was the importance for developing programs?

BLUMGART: Basically it had two aspects to it. On the development side it was basically technical assistance on a technical basis. There were very strong divisions in ICA in agriculture, in transportation...

Q: It was sectoral...

BLUMGART: That's right, sectoral: education, health, [inaudible]. These divisions or bureaus -- no, they were not bureaus, they were divisions -- reported directly to the number two person in the agency. Under AID the regional bureaus became the focus. And, so the sectors sectoral staff became advisory rather than operational. The decision making authority was essentially in the regional bureaus rather than the desk.

Q: At the wind up part of our interviews I certainly want to come back to questions like this because just as a person with a short time working within AID, what you're describing to me is almost the perennial discussion between the role of, I call them the people in Rosslyn, the technical bureau versus the geographic bureau. Now we have the global bureau, so I certainly want to encourage you to keep this theme and themes of this sort in mind, particularly when we get to the summary part of looking back on your experience, and looking at different approaches to development and what you think has worked and what hasn't worked. It is interesting to note that this theme of the role of the central bureaus, or whatever you want to call them -- apparently it is called the global bureau -- is one that has...versus, or at least in comparison with the role of the geographic bureau is one that has been a subject of discussion and analysis for a number of years...

BLUMGART: And tension.

Q: ...and tension.

BLUMGART: You are quite right, Bob. This is a perennial organizational and style issue that never seems to have a perfect solution. Being a desk officer in the new AID was a great job.

Q: What did you find yourself doing?

BLUMGART: Well, as a desk officer, instead of having technical people running their own show, they were supposed to be accountable to [inaudible].

Q: Were they stationed in the geographic bureau or what?

BLUMGART: They were. Some of them were. The loan officers were stationed in the desk. Some of the sector people, too. So, becoming a desk officer acquired a lot of authority and freedom of action. We were supervised by the head of the bureau and his staff. It was a very challenging and interesting experience. I think that going back to the way it was before, it is the kind of structure I think that really makes a great deal of sense when you are a major player in the international development field. At that time, in the early 60's, AID was a major player, if not the major player, along with the World Bank.

Q: Were you a separate agency at that point or were you associated with the State Department? What relationship did you have to the State Department?

BLUMGART: Well, the Administrator of AID was, after Hamilton left he was succeeded by David Bell, who had previously been the head of the bureau of the Budget. He was probably the strongest and most effective AID administrator we ever had. A superb thinker and administrator. And the head of AID was theoretically the number three person in the State Department. AID was in the State Department and the head of AID reported to the Secretary of State. In those days AID resisted the State Department's attempts to use AID for short term political purposes.

Q: That's another, I think, recurring theme. N'est-ce pas?

BLUMGART: And being in the Far East bureau...the war in Vietnam ... there was all kinds of pressure from the State side of Foggy Bottom to do things that State felt was important. And there was quite a bit of tension between State and AID on program priorities and objectives of foreign assistance and on the technical support. And the institutions and organizations we should be supplying. And so it was a very exciting time, too. Being a desk officer was a very rewarding and interesting place to be at that time in AID's history.

Later, I moved on to become a Deputy Director of an office which had several desks in it. Burma...let's see. What were the others...Thailand, Burma, Laos -- I think Laos. Vietnam was so big by then it was a separate office in itself.

Q: So, your initial activity with the Ford Foundation and with AID was quite focused in the Far East.

BLUMGART: Right.

Q: What sort of projects were being undertaken by AID?

BLUMGART: That was sort of the interesting thing about it. Our portfolio was so varied and so large. One of the things that I got involved in almost immediately was a huge telecommunications project for Thailand that involved the construction of -- what do they

call them, repeater stations? ... microwave relay stations to carry messages from Bangkok into the provinces to microwave relay stations to the provincial level. That was a huge project. We were involved in university construction, university education ...community development was a major theme in Thailand.

Q: Were these projects that were implemented through the host government, John? For instance, your telecommunications project.

BLUMGART: Yes. Well, the construction and start-up was implemented by contractors contracted by AID. So they constructed the towers and the infrastructure.

Q: At that point, were there project officers within the AID mission overseas that were following the work?

BLUMGART: Right. AID missions at that time were quite large, and most of them were staffed by direct hires, AID employees. The Bangkok mission was quite large. I think it must have had maybe 50, 60, 70 people. And it was led by a mission director and the missions were organized on a sectoral basis. I guess quite a bit similar to the situation when you joined AID. Various sectoral divisions headed by a division chief and reporting to the mission director. We had a major police program, too, in Thailand. Those were abolished later on. Internal security was a major priority in the Thai program and we had a very large police training program and a large police training staff in the AID mission.

Q: As you look back on the Thai portfolio, what do you think worked and what do you think didn't work or had problems?

BLUMGART: My feeling is that the things that worked best -- this gets, again, getting back to the summary of our talk -- it seems to me the things that worked best in Thailand were projects which were, I was going to say, economically neutral. Projects that helped the economy to speed up or expand in a direction that it was naturally taking. By that I mean roads, bridges, and telecommunications. Projects that are sort of useless to the economy as a whole. And I think the projects that required a lot of knowledge and fine tuning from a social standpoint were less successful.

Q: Can you give me some examples of what you would put under that movement?

BLUMGART: Community development. In some cases agriculture. I think that in so many cases we tried to replicate in Thailand what agriculturalists in the United States, many of whom were under the Department of Agriculture, simply extrapolated from their experience in Nebraska and elsewhere what they thought would work in Thailand. We had a major malaria program, too.

Q: Was there any requirement at this point that the host government had to participate economically in terms of making a labor input?

BLUMGART: There was. This is where the conflict between State and AID often came because we were always demanding that the Thais put up more of their resources to demonstrate their bona fides and to promote the idea that we were there <<inaudible>>... And the State Department was saying, "Well, really, we should do it because they are in a crisis. They are being threatened across the Mekong and they don't have the resources, that's what we're here for so let's do it and get it done." The Thais were very, probably... I had the feeling that they had the knowledge and capacity to know that if they held out long enough we would cave in, and it happened. The Ambassador would weigh in and AID would cave. Only a couple of times were we able to win out. And at that time, David Bell, the head of AID, had to carry the flag. It wasn't too difficult because at that time the ambassador in Bangkok was Graham Martin who later became the ambassador to Vietnam. Some of his commands were so outrageous that they were fairly easy to combat.

Q: Well, after being Desk Officer for Thailand then you were Deputy of an office that covered several other countries...

BLUMGART: Yes, all in Southeast Asia.

Q: Were the projects of those other countries pretty similar to ones we had in Thailand?

BLUMGART: By and large, I would have to say so, yes.

Q: Well, after Southeast Asia, what happened? After that particular assignment as Deputy Director of an office in the Far East.

BLUMGART: I moved on to Latin America.

USAID Program in Bolivia- Assignment as USAID Assistant Director for Programs

Q: How did you get switched from one part of the world to the another?

BLUMGART: Well, I sort of put my resume up for grabs and made it known through the agency that I was looking for an overseas assignment. May and I talked about the desirability of going overseas from the standpoint of our children and our age, it seemed like a good time to be doing that, and we had enjoyed Jakarta very much, Indonesia very much, and the idea of again living abroad and getting familiar with another culture was appealing. I almost was sent to Nigeria, but that didn't work out. I met with the people in the Latin American bureau. The Latin American bureau was a bureau with unto itself -- because in that year they had what was called a back-to-back arrangement...

Q: What was that?

BLUMGART: ...where they merged the desks, the country desks, and some of them were headed by AID people and some of them -- most of them -- were headed by State Department people. They were joint desks. The head of the Bolivia office -- I think the

Bolivia office, but part of a larger office which included Peru and a couple of other countries -- the head of that office was a man by the name of Dincer, William Dincer, who went on to become the secretary of an AID reorganization task force. I think it was when Lucius Clay, the former diplomat in Germany, in Berlin, was asked to head up a reorganization task force for AID, or for the Latin American bureau. I'm not sure which. It was AID, I think. But Dincer became Clay's Staff Director. I met him and I was impressed by him, and I also met the Deputy Chief of Mission for the State Department and I was very impressed by him.

Q: You say Deputy Chief of Mission. You mean for the bureau?

BLUMGART: Deputy Chief of Mission, what the State Department people call the DCM.

Q: Oh you mean for Bolivia.

BLUMGART: The DCM for the embassy in Bolivia. Our embassy in Bolivia. I read about the program, I read about the program, and it seemed like an exciting country. The program was vast. There was a little bit of everything. Probably too vast, but we were building roads, we were providing technical assistance for railroads, deep into agriculture and community development. Trying to help the national mining company with its tin mining operation. It was a staggering program. May and I spent three years in Bolivia. I was the Assistant Director for Programs during that period. The Mission Director was a man with considerable Latin American experience. He had come up through the Point Four route. Even before the Point Four route were these organizations called *servicios* that were very active during the Second World War providing technical assistance to Latin America on a technical basis, on a sector basis. They were sort of semi-public/semi-private organizations, very much the brainchild of one of the Rockefeller brothers.

So, again it was a great job. It was a fascinating country. One of the great things about it is that when you are overseas you seem to have more control over your time, more autonomy and more flexibility. May and I did quite a bit of traveling and enjoyed that very much. Bolivia is such a heterogeneous country. You have the sierra, the altiplano, you have the lowland plateau, the lowland savannah area called the Beni and you have the areas that are in between, valleys. It is isolated and cut off from the sea, but it has good communications with its neighbors.

Q: What sort of projects did you have?

BLUMGART: Well, it was a very broad program. We were providing budget support to the Bolivian government, and that got us involved sort of in macroeconomic policies because we were conditioning our budget support on certain reforms and activities on the part of the Bolivian government.

Q: Do you think that with that budget support that we were effective in making some, you want structural changes macro changes?

BLUMGART: I'm not sure how effective we were over the long run. But in getting some taxes changed and getting some other changes made in the way the central government operated we were able to do a few things. We had a huge local currency program. We were converting so many dollars into local currency that we had local currency coming out of our eyeballs, you know! And we were doing a lot of support to local institutions with our counterpart...

Q: Were you just directly converting dollars?

BLUMGART: Well, a lot of it was PL-480 and some of it was direct conversion. The budget support was

Q: ...here with John Blumgart. I believe at the end of tape number two we were discussing some of the different projects that USIA was undertaking in Bolivia while you were there. USAID in Bolivia. Could you identify some of these?

BLUMGART: As I mentioned before, one of the most interesting was assistance to the central government budgetary system which got us involved into macroeconomic policy, problems of exchange rate, central government financial reform, taxation policy...things of that nature. It was amazing to me how intimately we were involved in some of the most sensitive aspects of the country's economy. Something that I don't think would have been possible in the Far East Bureau given the politicization of the aid relationship there.

Q: Why do you think we were able to be so involved, say in comparison with Thailand?

BLUMGART: Because the program in Latin America was not just a response to the communist subversive threat. It had a validity in and of its own. It was an attempt to really move the economies of Latin America forward. It was under the [inaudible] that the major foreign aid policies of the [inaudible]... So, our work in Bolivia wasn't colored by the fear of communist subversion. It was there, but it wasn't the overriding consideration.

Q: That's a very interesting contrast.

BLUMGART: So we were able to do more things on their own merits rather than because of another agenda.

Q: Were the Bolivians very open to having you get into ...

BLUMGART: Yes. That's another thing that was quite extraordinary. The Bolivians have such a turbulent history. They've had literally scores of coup d'etats. When May and I were there, it was during a relatively tranquil period of Bolivian domestic politics, and also a relatively enlightened one. They had a serious system of government. They had co-presidents. That worked for a while, then the two separated and the better of the

two became the sole president. During that period that we were there I really felt that the country was making some progress towards development and towards addressing some of its central problems. And as I say, it is a beautiful country, a pleasant country.

Q: Beyond the macro, budget support and the macro questions in terms of the overall economy... Before we leave that, did you get into any structural adjustment? In terms of your budget support, macro approach, did you get any major changes?

BLUMGART: We were trying to get the Bolivians to make changes in the tax laws, make changes in their foreign exchange rate policy, so it was very close to what the World Bank was trying to do.

Q: So you were working for some fundamental changes in the macro sense. In addition to the macro efforts, how about other rural activity, project activity?

BLUMGART: We were heavily involved in road construction, which was very important in Bolivia because it is such a difficult terrain and communications is always a problem there. Building roads led to an opening market. So, it was, I think, again one of those things that I think AID does best. Doesn't have a political slant to it. It is something that works on its own merits. We had a major, a large involvement in helping out with a lot of agro work. I'm not sure how successful they were.

Q: What were the problems?

BLUMGART: Marketing was one. Pricing policy was another.

Q: Pricing policy of the firm, or the government?

BLUMGART: Of the enterprise that was trying to become self-sufficient.

Q: Was this a profit-making thing? Was it a parastatal firm?

BLUMGART: A little of both, I think. Some of them were parastatals, some of them were private enterprises, and some of them were cooperatives. Another thing that I was directly involved in was attempting to help the Bolivian corporation that ran the tin mines, which were huge, monstrous operations. We sort of tinkered. I don't think we were very successful. We were involved in technical assistance to the railroads. We had a community development program, particularly for the peasants in the Altiplano. It was mostly to help the farmers who were sort of an underclass of Bolivian society. We were providing credit and loans.

Q: How was this help channeled? What was the implementing entity?

BLUMGART: [inaudible]...

Q: Did they have extension agents?

BLUMGART: Yeah.

Q: How do you think that went?

BLUMGART: I'm not sure. The book we got from the community development people was very positive, but I just don't know, John. I don't know whether we knew enough about how that society worked. What the incentives were, how the reward systems went. I just don't know. My feeling was that as soon as we were out of town we would often think of [inaudible] American experience and maybe not really getting to the core of the problem.

Q: So you were in Bolivia for three years, in the program office?

BLUMGART: Uh-huh.

Q: And then, after Bolivia?

BLUMGART: Back to Thailand.

Q: Oh!

Mekong River Development: Work with the Southeast Asia Regional Economic Development Office

BLUMGART: That was a sort of a detour. There was a special office that had been established at the Embassy in Bangkok to initiate and implement a Southeast Asia regional aid program.

Q: A development program?

BLUMGART: Uh-huh. It was a positive side of our involvement in Vietnam. It was Lyndon B. Johnson hired the former president of the World Bank, Eugene Black, to go through Southeast Asia and see what possibilities were for regional cooperation among the Southeast Asian countries. Including especially the Mekong program. The Mekong River Development Program. Following that, a small office was established in Bangkok to implement it and push it along and provide funding for it.

Q: What was that office called -- do you remember?

BLUMGART: It was called RED -- Regional Economic Development Office. So we lived in Bangkok for two years. I was the program officer for the office. The head of the office was a colorful person called Louis St. Lawrence.

Q: Yes, I've met Louis St. Lawrence.

BLUMGART: Ex Peace Corps.

Q: Oh yes, I've met Louis St. Lawrence.

BLUMGART: Have you.

Q: Yes.

BLUMGART: Well, we'll have to talk about that at lunch time. In addition to sort of being the general program officer for the office I was also sort of a liaison with the Mekong Committee. I got involved with work on the Mekong Committee, which is a fascinating experience. The Mekong Committee being the committee set up by the United Nations to coordinate development in the Mekong River. It had a small secretariat [inaudible]. The Mekong Committee had its own secretariat as well. The major activity with that was with the ...name of the huge dam – Pa Mong. There was a huge mainstream dam called the Pa Mong Dam and AID hired the Bureau of Reclamation to do the feasibility studies.

Q: The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation?

BLUMGART: Yeah. It was the most expensive feasibility study ever undertaken. Millions and millions of dollars. Fifteen hundred million dollars.

Q: Where was this dam to be located?

BLUMGART: Between Laos and Thailand. On the frontier. The feasibility study involved a huge land classification study. Scores of Bureau of Reclamation soil samplers collecting soil samples all over northeast Thailand and Laos.

Q: Were these Americans collecting the samples?

BLUMGART: Yes, from the Bureau of Reclamation. The political situation.... After we were thrown out of Vietnam, and that project didn't see the light of day. A huge study.

Q: Where are all those records, the soil samples...

BLUMGART: Down in the AID archives. But May and I didn't enjoy Thailand very much on that tour because we were so close to the Vietnam War. In Bangkok there were all the rest and recreation facilities soldiers visiting the place, and the crime and the drugs and the pollution.

Q: Am I correct having the impression that it was mostly a planning operation, coordinating?

BLUMGART: Actually, attempting to start projects. In each of these six or seven countries in Southeast Asia -- Indonesia, Malaysia...

Q: Who would oversee the project? At the AID mission? Or the local government?

BLUMGART: The local government. There was also a sort of tension between our office and local agents because they wanted to control our activities in their country.

Q: How did that work out? Did they?

BLUMGART: Well, they eventually came to a compromise where our work was very closely monitored by the local agent. Joint decision making how the project was being handled. Matching me up with Louis St. Lawrence was not a very good match because we didn't get along very well together.

Q: He was the head of this regional office?

BLUMGART: Yes. So that was an experience I'd glad to see come to an end when it did. After that, the rest of my career was in the Africa bureau. Maybe this would be a good time to...

Q: Good time to stop

USAID Africa Development Programs

Q: All right, we're continuing on Monday afternoon, September 4th. Continuing in the conversation with John Blumgart. When we had finished last time, I think we were winding up with John's assignment in the Far East, and he was just about ready to enter the Africa bureau. Is that correct, John? Take us into the Africa bureau.

BLUMGART: My career in the Africa bureau began with a telephone call to David Shear while I was still in Bangkok. I had put my hat in the ring for a follow-on assignment, and I heard through the grapevine, I guess it was, that Shear, who was then the head of the program office at the Africa bureau, was looking for a subordinate to handle the planning function of the office. So, I got hold of his phone number at home and calculated the time twelve hours in advance -- or behind, I can't remember which -- and called him from Bangkok. A little girl answered the phone and I asked her whether her daddy was home and she said, "I'll see." As I waited I thought my career was hanging at the whim of a five year old! David did come to the phone and we started talking about the possibility of working in the Africa bureau. And one step led to another and after home leave, from the Bangkok assignment, I did start working there.

Q: Let me see how I'm recording here, John...So, David Shear is on the phone and you're talking.

Africa Bureau Program Office

BLUMGART: Yeah. After home leave I did start working there as Assistant Director for Planning, or something like that. I was head of a small office -- it was in the program office of the Africa Bureau. At that time, the head of the Africa Bureau was Dr. Sam Adams, a distinguished diplomat and public servant. I think -- can't remember now who his deputy was -- might have been Don Brown, but I'm not sure. But the Africa Bureau was a very lively organization and the program as a whole was expanding at that time.

Q: This was in what year, roughly?

BLUMGART: Uh, 1960.

Q: No, I think 1960 was the Alliance for Progress, right?

BLUMGART: You're right. I'm off by a decade. 1970. The fall of 1970. The Africa Bureau program started with almost nothing in the late 50's or early 60's and then grew significantly after the African countries achieved their independence. My job was really concerned with liaison with the academic community with respect to Africa. Funding or helping to fund or suggesting trying to establish priorities for research in development issues in Africa. Things that we could fund, grants that we could make, ways in which we could collaborate with other academic institutions to investigate the African experience and how it could help foreign aid agencies, how they could benefit from that. Also, an interesting part of the job was coordination with other donors. While we were still the predominant donor in the world and in Africa, the Europeans -- particularly the French and the British -- were the major donors. Particularly the French. Certainly the French had a major program in Africa; several programs. So, coordination with them, and with the World Bank and with other donors was a major preoccupation for AID and the Africa Bureau. My job was to re-do the staff work for that kind of coordination.

It was very educational for me because it gave me a good introduction to the African scene from the donor standpoint. I helped arrange a number of meetings on African development issues. I also became familiar with the African Studies Association, a major academic institution that was concerned with Africa. That was interesting, too, because the association had been disturbed by a schism which had arisen within it between minority Africanists and the general academic world interested in Africa. I think the African-Americans started their own organization for a few years, but then I think they returned and the two patched up their differences.

Another interesting aspect was to find out about what kind of research and research institutions were going on in Africa devoted to development issues. One of my first major assignments in the bureau was to do a survey of selected African countries. Fellow AID person from the DPC office, named Ted Wright whom I think is now -- or he was -- moved to the World Bank after he worked for AID. We made a trip together to Africa, visited about six or eight countries, and interviewed the heads of African research institutions, either those connected with government or private. The idea was to encourage closer links between the research institutions and the development authorities within the countries. Also to see whether a program would be feasible by which we

would make grants to the research institutions to develop their capabilities to do policy-oriented research. That took me to all those countries and to meet a lot of the economic leaders of the countries, economic officials of the countries, and the people running the research programs of the country, particularly economic research, social research as well. It was interesting. A wonderful opportunity. That job lasted two or three years, as I recall.

Q: Let me just ask you. Were there grants made to some of these institutions? AID grants?

BLUMGART: Yes, we made several. The program made one in Cameroon, I remember...

[END TAPE TWO, SIDE A]

BLUMGART: ...made several in other countries. My memory is a little vague now. The problem AID ran into in making these grants were AID regulations of one kind or another which made it difficult for us to make these grants without insisting upon all the monitoring and Buy America and other stipulations that normal bilateral projects face. It took us a long time to make these grants and often, because of these procedural problems, the Africans lost interest and decided it wasn't worth their time and patience.

Q: Where you did make grants, do you have any idea of the outcome of the research?

BLUMGART: That's a good question. I remember the one in Cameroon worked out very well.

Q: When you say "worked out very well" what do you have in mind?

BLUMGART: I wish I could be more specific. It was a long time ago -- twenty four years. We were fortunate in providing the grant to a reasonably competent agency and they did produce some analyses and some papers that were worthwhile. The success of the grants was largely a function of the interest of the local mission director of the project. In Cameroon, the local person wasn't actually a mission director in rank but he was the AID person in Cameroon for several countries at that time... His name was Charles Grader. I'm not sure whether you ran into him in Zaire or not.

Q: I seem to remember that name.

BLUMGART: He picked up the ball on it and did the negotiating that followed, the negotiating and monitoring. I wish I could be more specific about what he did and the outcome was but it was so long ago. But my general impression, based on his reports and my own experience because I went back there several times. But it helped the government and it was in line with our objectives.

Q: All right. Then you spent two or three years in that program office for the bureau. Then what?

Move to Technical Resources Operations in the Bureau for Africa

BLUMGART: My memory is a little vague, but I went to another job in the technical resources bureau or office of the Africa bureau. I think I was an assistant director -- yeah, I was an assistant director for...I can't remember what my title was. But I was about the number three person in the office. Princeton Lyman was the director, and there was another person after him, then me. My job was sort of a floating job, responsible for odds and ends. I wish I could be more specific, but it did involve...at that time we were facing a terrible problem in the Sahel with the drought, and the Africa bureau was trying to respond to that. Several teams were sent out to develop a strategy for coping with the drought. A study team headed by the late Ed Fay -- I'm not sure if that name rings any bells with you -- he was a coordinator for Africa in PPC. A person of great integrity and stature. He headed a team to the Sahel and developed a series of recommendations on how the bureau might respond to the crisis. They recommended sort of a two phase response: immediate assistance in terms of food and in terms of cash, in terms of alleviating the immediate suffering and disruption; and the second was what they called the medium term program which was to rely on serious projects really for whole countries. I guess one of the really exciting things in that phase, I was, I co-chaired a 26 person design team to design a range and livestock project in Mauritania, Senegal and...

Q: And Mali?

Designing Range and Livestock Programs for West Africa

BLUMGART: Yes.

Q: I don't see how you could have... I shouldn't say this as an interviewer, but I couldn't see how you could have an AID livestock program in Africa without including Mali. It's been there for many years.

BLUMGART: Yes. Well, that was a fascinating experience. As a matter of fact it was kind of overwhelming trying to coordinate 26 design people. We split up into three teams -- one for each country -- and my co-chairman was Howard Helman who is still with AID. A very talented and imaginative, energetic, person. At that time he was in our Paris liaison office in the Embassy. He was the liaison between AID and the French Economic Aid Program. He temporarily absented himself from that position to work with me on the range livestock program.

Q: Did this project get approved and implemented?

BLUMGART: All three of them done. All three projects. Other people who had illustrious or distinguished careers in AID on that team were Bob Schumaker, who I believe is still with AID, and Gary Nelson who recently left AID after a distinguished career as a deputy mission director and mission director. Gary and Bob were in charge of the Senegal project. I took on the Mauritania project and Howard with the Mali project.

Mauritania was fascinating. Because there was practically nobody in Nouakchott at that time. The program in those three countries, and others in that part of Africa, was run out of a regional office in Senegal, at Dakar. They had a liaison office, AID liaison person, in each of the three countries. In fact, when I was there they didn't even have that. Once we had established a project there in Mauritania, they put a person in. But, coming to Mauritania and trying to start a program there was sort of exploring terra incognita. It was really a fascinating experience. It gave me an opportunity to look at the social dimension of development projects. Our technical people had one sort of mind set how a range and livestock program was constructed. Vital was rotational grazing. Move the cattle from one point to another then to a third to avoid degrading the pasture. Mauritians didn't know what we were talking about because they had these migratory patterns and the idea of keeping cattle in one spot and then moving them on to another according to a plan devised by people from the western part of the United States was a mystery. I remember several, for me high level meetings, meetings with ministers and the ambassador, our Ambassador to Mauritania, in which I tried to sell the concept of rotational grazing. The Mauritians are very polite, and very forthcoming, but they expressed skepticism as to whether it would really work in practice.

Q: Were they right?

BLUMGART: Well, I conveyed all this. I went ahead and dutifully prepared the project paper just as we had designed it. But when the review...when the project was reviewed back in Washington... The bureau had established a special committee for reviewing these Sahel projects called the...what was it called again? Harry Dean Johnson was the...the word committee was in the title and I'll think of it as we go along. This committee was set up to review all these medium term projects which were being generated to address the drought. Our project came up after we submitted it to Washington and I was quite frank about the imponderables of the project and whether it would fly from a social and cultural standpoint. Harry Dean decided that we should put it on the back burner for a while and see whether the sociologists would lead to answer some of these social and cultural issues that we didn't have time to really address in the design phase. All that worked on that project was to send a couple of anthropologists to North Africa to try and get answers to these issues. We fielded a young Peace Corps couple. The wife had quite a bit of sociological background and the husband was a range and livestock person. We thought maybe we had the right combination to get an insight. Unfortunately, they both became ill out there and had to cut short their residence. So, we made what modifications we could on the project and improved it.

Q: Do I understand you, Jack. I know later on in the AID project design and review process that there was very specific provision for -- I forget exactly what it was called -- social soundness analysis, something like that. Was there any specific provision at that time for social soundness analysis or social analysis?

BLUMGART: Oh, yes, there was. I think that as we got deeper and deeper in project planning and design in Africa, we became more and more aware of the significant social dimensions of these projects. As a result, the social soundness analysis became much

more rigorous and involved. At that time, in '74 -- this was 1974 -- we had to pay attention to it but I don't think we had the rigorous [inaudible]. But it was called to our attention just by being there and dealing with the livestock service of the government and with the economic sector in the country.

Q: You mention, John, at this time that the program was, the AID program at least at this time the program was...the AID program was operated at least in that part of Africa out of a regional office headquartered in Dakar, Senegal. As I recall, that was on the basis of what was called the Korry Report, something like that, where there was a recommendation that AID cut back some of its offices or missions overseas. One way to do that was to use this regional approach, which we certainly had in Senegal. I don't know how many countries that Senegal was...the regional development officer, whatever he or she was called, was supposed to cover. Three or four at least?

BLUMGART: Yeah. The Dakar office covered Mauritania and Mali and it may have...

Q: Senegal, certainly. I'm quite sure it covered Chad, too, or Chad was out or Cameroon. So you had a regional office operating out of Cameroon and a regional office operating out of Dakar, too.

BLUMGART: Yeah, and there was a third, too.

Q: Let me ask you. Today, AID is in the process of cutting back missions. Based on what you saw of that regional approach in the early 70's, anyway, do you think that's a viable way to go in terms of cutting back, if you have to cut back missions, is that a viable method of operation?

Merits of Regional Approach in USAID Operations in Africa

BLUMGART: I think that the choice is between and doing that is one option and the second would be to run the program from Washington like the World Bank does.

Q: Which would you favor, based on your experience?

BLUMGART: I think AID's strength is having personnel in the field. I think that gives us a knowledge and insight into history and tradition that makes for more intelligent decisions. More thoughtful decisions. So I think I would go the regional route, and I suppose the regional approach in West Africa; it was sound novel at all. I think we had a regional office in the Ivory Coast as well.

Q: Well, that's certainly very possible. Abidjan was certainly a big transportation crossroads.

BLUMGART: The regional officer in Dakar at that time was an African-American named David Gadsden. Do you know him?

Q: Yes, I do.

BLUMGART: He's now with the UNDP. We had a small staff in Dakar which -- I don't think we... no we did not have resident staff in the other key places, Nouakchott and Bamako, as I recall. The Dakar staff looked after the whole program. Later on they did station liaison people and then gradually, as the program expanded, missions were established. But I think that if we are retrenching, having a regional office is better than...

Q: Doing it out of Washington. In terms of these large livestock projects that were established in Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. Do you have any idea of how they turned out in practice?

BLUMGART: Well, I think the one in Mauritania was a dead loss. I've asked people who went to the Mauritania mission what happened, and all they can tell me is that they had seen remnants of some fencing and corrals. I don't think the results were very positive. The one in Bakel we had one in Bakel. That's the one that Bob Schumaker and Gary Nelson were. My recollection is that none of them really turned out very well. There was somehow our approach, somehow the factors involved... I don't know whether it was our fault or whether it was just the conditions of livestock were too harsh, for the donor to grapple with, but I'm not sure about the one in Mali. The project -- we had two projects Mali livestock 1 and Mali livestock 2 -- and I was heavily involved in both of them. And I'm told that some components of each of them were successful. I think that given the fact that livestock were such a major industry in those countries, and such a sensitive industry involving migratory herdsman and pastoral life. I think that experience was one that made me hesitant about AID's ability to grapple social and cultural constraints that were so strong. It made me feel that we could do better trying to solve simpler questions...simpler, but no less important.

Q: Such as?

BLUMGART: Well, when we were talking about Bolivia the other day, I think that some of the most successful projects in Bolivia were our road projects.

Q: Sort of concrete infrastructure.

BLUMGART: And work in their own experience.

Q: After coordinating the design and passage, the adopting and improving the three livestock projects, what did you do then?

BLUMGART: Well, at that time AID was going through another one of its, the Africa bureau was going through another one of its permutations, and the technical office that I was involved in was reorganized and I became head of a section called Special Development Projects.

Chief of Special Development Projects: Environment and Energy Programs

Q: I think I've heard of that somewhere.

BLUMGART: You are somewhat familiar with. The main offices were education, health, agriculture. They followed the language of the Foreign Assistance Act which placed an emphasis on trying to reach the lower strata of...

Q: What was in this portfolio of Special Development Projects? What sort of projects were you dealing with?

BLUMGART: Well, special development projects was a sort of an...hard to characterize.

Q: What subject matter were you dealing with?

BLUMGART: We were dealing in macro-economic issues, and we actually got a couple of economists on at the beginning. Environment was a major component. Under pressure from the environmentalists and also because of the desire on the part of AID leadership to pursue environmentally sound projects and processes. The Agency established an environmental office centrally and each of the bureaus had their environmental unit. The environmental unit of the Africa bureau was associated with my office. It was charged with reviewing all of our projects from an environmental standpoint...

Q: When you say all of our projects, you mean all of the Africa bureau's projects? What other subjects were covered?

BLUMGART: Energy. That was during a phase when the Carter Administration and the Agency and the U.S. Government in general was feeling the effects of the oil shortage and recognizing our over-dependence on imported oil. U.S. policy at that time was to try to, the Department of Energy in particular took the lead...

Q: I'm just going to check one minute that we're registering all right. I want to register that this is tape number five in the interview with John Blumgart. September 4th. We're ready to continue the interview with John Blumgart. We're in the Special Development Projects Division -- was it John? Or was it office? I think it was a division in the Office of Development Resources. And you mentioned that the portfolio included macro analysis, environment, energy, appropriate technology...

BLUMGART: ...technology transfer. Some people call it the cats and dogs of the Africa bureau program. Activities that didn't fit the format of the AID program of that time, which was heavily concentrated on agriculture, health and education. Because it was kind of heterogeneous and operated over a number of fields, that made it more interesting, from my perspective. We assembled quite a good crew in that office. We had two very bright economists working at the economic problems of many of the African countries who also served as design officers for some of our program assistance grants.

Q: What do you mean by program assistance grants?

BLUMGART: Well, as opposed to projects assistance. Grants that we made to African countries to help with their balances in return for certain reforms that they promised to carry out. We started a fairly significant energy program.

Q: What kind of energy were you dealing with?

BLUMGART: Robert! That's a leading question!

Q: Yes, that's my job!

BLUMGART: I can't ask *you* that! Well, we hired an extraordinary guy named David French who became the bureau's energy advisor. I was very lucky to get him. He was an imaginative and sensitive person, he had a broad view of things. Given the emphasis on renewable energy and on activities that would reach the broad areas of the population, our emphasis was less on conventional fuels -- petroleum and electricity -- and more on renewable energy and non-traditional energy sources. Particularly fuel wood and energy devices that would conserve fuel wood. Because fuel wood, in the African context, was such an important energy source.

Q: I guess in the African context you could say fuel wood is indeed a traditional source of energy.

BLUMGART: So, that opened a lot of doors in terms of new directions, and David, as I said, was a very masculine and very active person. And my attitude, my philosophy, was to give him as much leeway as possible. We wouldn't have been... One thing that made it possible for us to do that was because I was lucky enough to get a good deputy, Bob MacAlister. Let's pat each other on the back here. No, Bob was an extraordinary strength in our office. With David taking the lead in the energy program, Bob and I could devote ourselves to more imaginative questions, and other activities of the office and help support David when he needed it. And he often needed it because it was a new program that had a lot of skeptics and competed for AID dollars with the more conventional types of energy programs which were more oriented toward commercial energy and petroleum products.

Q: Let me ask you, John, you mention that environmental review, etc., was an important part of the functions of this division. Certainly today, in 1995, when people are discussing development, a great deal of emphasis is given to the question of the environment. Based on the experience that you had in SDP -- Special Development Projects -- do you think that amount of attention is warranted? In terms of overall development strategy?

BLUMGART: More than warranted. I think it is absolutely crucial. I think that, if anything, we need to put more attention on environmental issues.

Q: Why do you say that?

BLUMGART: Well, because we are consuming our own resources at such a pace. The basic problem, I think, is the growth in the world's population. We need to feed and take care of the growing numbers of people and that so often results in environmental degradation as resources are used to meet that need. The critical question, particularly in the developing world, is how to conserve these resources, how to manage them more effectively and still to make them available to the population. I think it is a critical question, and I think it is going to be a more and more critical question for the United States and the industrial countries. It concerns me that there is such a strong feeling in the United States these days that it is a luxury rather than a necessity. I think that's wrong. I think that we are jeopardizing the birth right of the coming generation unless we do more to protect...

Q: In terms of the African context. The viewpoint or concern about the environment, how do you see renewable energy fitting into that context? Or do you see any connection here?

BLUMGART: I see a connection, Bob. I think anything we can do with the Africans to slow down the devastation of the forest area, make fuel wood and other renewable types of energy stretch further, I think it is terribly important. I think it is a battle we are not winning now at this point. I think what we have been able to do in our foreign aid program is a drop in the bucket in terms of what the needs are. I'm really pressed, though, if you ask what are the alternatives. I'm really pressed to give you a good answer on that because the resources are so slim and so much of Africa is sort of a hand-to-mouth situation that one is at a loss, really, where to start or where to continue. I know that some of the natural resource institutions like the World Wildlife Fund and others are working. I think their approach is right, to involve the communities in the protection and in the enhancement of their own resources and to permit these communities or encourage these communities to combine natural resource protection with development of their own area, areas, neighborhoods, farmlands. The whole concept of "buffer zones" around game areas fits into that approach. Whether it is going to be enough and whether the increase in population in Africa and the degradation of such large areas, and increasingly so, I just am not sure. It's hard keeping ahead of the problem.

Concerns about Technology Transfer

Q: You mentioned, John, that technology transfer is part of the SDP portfolio. What thoughts do you have about technology transfer in Africa in terms of development.

BLUMGART: That's a big question.

Q: You're a big thinker!

BLUMGART: Well, Bob, I'm afraid that we said that was part of our portfolio in trying to explain what our office did. It's a fairly broad issue. The thing that I always return to when thinking about that is the importance of the social dimension of the transfer process. You need to make technology transfer appropriate to the people to whom it is

being transferred. That requires a lot of understanding of the culture and the society which you are dealing with and to make the changes that are adaptable to the people you are trying to help. I think we found time after time in our mutual experience in that office that putting a pyrolytic converter in a laboratory, or a solar-thermal contraption in the solar energy in Niger, or helping the solar energy lab in Bamako is attractive when you're emphasizing solar energy, but how much help does it really provide to the countries and to the societies that we are helping?

That gets us into another problem, another aspect, which is...and this is, I guess, summing up, too. In so much of our work in Africa and on other continents we are dealing with people we know from our same cultural background, from the privileged and wealthy part of the society which we are trying to help. They're gaining from participating with us on these activities, enhancing their own positions in society and increasing their prestige. But, what benefit has a solar energy lab in Bamako have for the Malians?

Q: That is the ultimate question.

BLUMGART: I'm afraid that the answer isn't very encouraging in many instances. It is because, I think, we come from such a different society than the Africans, and the bureaucrats and technicians in the solar energy lab speak our language, we naturally gravitate towards them and think we've transferred something. But what the ripple effect is, what the multiplier is in terms of doing something about their energy problems is sometimes pretty baffling. I know a lot of...well, actually I don't know anything about foreign aid. I find it difficult to come to a satisfactory conclusion at this point. And that's one of them. I'm not cynical, I just feel that we've tended to over-simplify with the best of intentions and the best of aims. But looking back, I'm wondering if I returned to these places what I'd be able to identify, how much of a difference we've made, I don't know the answer.

Q: In terms of the work you did in the SDP division, do you have any other, any additional comments you'd like to make at this point about that work?

BLUMGART: Well, from a personal standpoint, it was really an interesting experience because it was so varied and it brought me into contact with great people in AID and in Africa, in our missions there. I'd like to think about that a little further, Bob, and maybe in the summary, some of the lessons of the whole SDP experience.

Q: All right, sure. Would you like to wind it up at this point?

BLUMGART: Yeah, why don't we.

Q: All right, we are now recording again on October 11th, reviewing his reflections and reminiscences concerning his career in AID and development. Well, John, we've spent time reviewing your career with AID and here we are in 1995, at a time when Congress is certainly questioning the future of American participation in development, the Administration, and there is also some discussion in the public in terms of what might be

our future activities in the field of international development. Based on your long experience with international development, I think it would be very interesting and appropriate to have any comments that you may wish to make concerning American international development here in 1995.

BLUMGART: Okay, Bob, let's talk about that. You're quite right in saying that the situation has obviously changed dramatically since I entered AID in 1960 when President Kennedy was just coming into office. Those were bright, optimistic times and there was an enthusiasm and a desire to accomplish, play a strong role overseas. I think that a lot of it was a very positive one, and is a result, I think, of the tension between the United States and the Soviet group that stimulated us to do a lot of the positive things that we were doing at that time. So, a lot of positive things came out of what you might call [inaudible].

Q: John, why don't you continue with a few more words?

BLUMGART: Okay, Bob. As you were saying [static]... situation [static]. There had been dramatic change in the environment and economic development and American role in it over the period, over the last 25 years. The change has not been all for the best. During the time [static] a significant portion of the total development assistance [static]... We're now one of many rather than [static]... quality and caliber of staff. One of the [static]... For me. How are we doing?

Q: Okay, I think.

BLUMGART: ...participate in the real experience, to participate in the organization when you have that kind of leadership.

BLUMGART: ...continue at that level. I think that one of the [static]...lack of pressure, lack of...<<tape stopped by interviewer>>

Q: Well, we're starting again. Go ahead.

BLUMGART: ...human beings [static]..strange ways [static] the fact that we're not threatened now by the Soviet empire [static]...and I think we should be taking advantage of the lack of the Soviet Union to [static] the world is not going to get better unless we help it to get better. [static]...being distracted by the [static]

Q: When you say smaller countries, which countries do you have in mind, John?

BLUMGART: [static] ...western European countries and East Asian countries [static]...we were hoping that Western European [static] European integration [static] would play a more ...role [static] increased in

Q: This is the conclusion of the interview with John Blumgart. We are finishing up on October the eleventh. Having worked in the same field as you have, John, and since you

are a former colleague, I want to say that it has been very interesting for me to hear you share your memories and your experience and I want to thank you very much for participating in the program.

End of interview