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FREDERICK E. GILBERT

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INTERVIEW

Q: I believe you served in AID for thirty years? Starting when?

GILBERT: 1964.

Q: Please tell about your early life.

Early years and education

GILBERT: I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. My father was with the International Harvester Company. He was exempt from the draft because of a stiff leg due to a car accident. During World War II he was transferred to Birmingham, Alabama. I lived in Alabama from the age of 2 until I was almost 11, except for a year when we lived in the Chicago area due to my father's work. About half way through our years in Alabama, my father and a partner bought an International Harvester dealership in Bessemer, Alabama. The coal and iron industry strikes of that period caused his business to drop off to the point that it would no longer support two families. He and his partner sold that dealership, and we moved to Austin, Minnesota where he and a new partner bought another dealership. That business included a Packard agency that went on the rocks in 1954 when I was 15. We returned to Minneapolis where he went back to work for the International Harvester Company in their Minneapolis branch.

In Minneapolis, as previously, I attended public schools. The high school I went to was Washburn. It was quite good, and I think at least 60 per cent of its graduates went on to college. I took science and math in high school. I graduated in 1957, and, at that time, it was just assumed that any serious young man with any brains at all would gravitate to engineering. In the Sputnik era, that almost seemed like a patriotic duty.

Q: What led to your career in USAID.

GILBERT: I started out in pre-engineering, and I just scraped through with "Cs." I was bored to tears. The lectures and reading affected me like knockout drops. By a great stroke of luck, through family connections, I got a job with the Minnesota Highway Department as a summer engineering intern following my freshman year. I thought I might discover that I liked what engineers did more than I liked what they studied. If so, it might be worth seeing through. Half way through that summer I knew that I didn't care much for what engineers did either. So I spent the rest of the summer pondering what I should do about it.

Since I was headed for mining engineering, I got to thinking about my reasons for selecting that. I realized they were largely pecuniary. I also realized that I would be unlikely to succeed in anything for which I felt no enthusiasm. This led me to wonder what I would do if I was independently wealthy and could simply follow my interests. It came to me that I had thought mining engineering, as opposed to other engineering fields, would lead to overseas living experiences and international work. I thought, "Wait a minute, dummy! If that's what you are interested in, why not take the direct route and actually major in International Relations?" I did and never slept in class or the library again. My grades shot up into the range of respectability.

Q: Had you any exposure before that that would have pricked your interest?

GILBERT: My mother never went to college. This was due to economic reasons. My grandmother, who was a career woman (a dietician trained at the Boston Cooking School), had died when my mother was 18. My grandfather's earnings as a teacher in small, residential Norwegian Lutheran secondary schools and colleges were very low. My maternal grandparents didn't live together for roughly the last ten years of my grandmother's life, reflecting something like divorce Norwegian Lutheran-style. These circumstances and my grandmother's death about when my mother graduated from high school made my mother the breadwinner to her two younger siblings when she should have been in college. Nevertheless, she was one of the more complete intellectuals I have ever known. She read voraciously in French and English. A strikingly good-looking woman, she was also something of a walking encyclopedia.

We had a lot of books around the house, either our own or on loan from various libraries. While still in grade school I was well on my way to reading everything that Kipling ever wrote. One of the first adult books I read was Jan Karski's *The Secret State*. Others were *The Wall* by John Hersey, *Strange Lands* and *Friendly People* by William O. Douglas. Yet others included a book called *Coronet* by a man named Komroff, one on exploring the Gobi Desert by Roy Chapman Andrews. Many were Book of the Month Club selections. Most of the books that stick in my memory were about foreign countries and other cultures.

Another factor was growing up in Minnesota where so many people, well represented among members of the various elites, are "hyphenated" Americans and mindful, not to say prideful, of their backgrounds. Minnesota is much more than proportionately represented among Foreign Service people. This owes a lot to the quality of the public schools and the numbers of trained people generated by the state and private university-level institutions.

Another huge factor was that my Norwegian-American grandfather lived with us during much of my childhood. He had received a classical education at Decorah Luther College, which was about the "only game in town" in his Norwegian Lutheran milieu. He taught Latin and Greek and had studied Hebrew. He also spoke Norwegian and German. He was a wonderful conversationalist and intellectual mentor. It was as if I had my own Merlin (as depicted in The Once and Future King). He never pushed any information or ideas on me. Instead his approach could be likened to that of a skilled and patient fly fisherman. Whenever I bit on a lure he would reel me in toward an understanding of the background, source or foundation of some enticing remark or tidbit of information. Just to indicate how strong the Norwegian milieu was, my mother - who, like her parents, was born in Minnesota - learned her English in primary school. Yet my grandfather, and no doubt my grandmother, spoke English perfectly.

When I graduated with a major in International Relations from the University of Minnesota, I got a tuition scholarship at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts. When I graduated from there, I had a two-year Master's Degree (MALD). After staying around long enough to take my Ph.D. generals, I went to work for AID in January of 1964.

Q: Was there any particular concentration while you were at Tufts?

GILBERT: There, as at Minnesota, I concentrated in International Economics. But, a big turning point occurred in the second semester of my first year at Fletcher. I took a course in Development Economics taught by Charles Kindleberger (of MIT) and Don Humphrey. And that set me off in a new direction. It was such a quirky application of economics and so inescapably interdisciplinary. It just fascinated me. Then, later on - during that second year that I was at Fletcher, I guess - I was amazed to learn that, wonder of wonders, there was actually an agency of the U.S. government concerned with applying the things I had been studying. Up to then I had seen myself as headed for a career in the State Department (i.e. diplomatic) Foreign Service. From then on my sights shifted to a career in AID.

But we had to have both functional and area concentrations. Though my functional concentration was in international and development economics, my area concentration became Asia.

Q: Asia?

GILBERT: And I fully expected that I would go to work for AID and focus my career on Southern Asia, probably not the Far East.

Q: How did you hear about AID and the Foreign Assistance Program?

GILBERT: I'm not sure I can reconstruct it exactly. But I am pretty sure I learned a lot about AID from Brad Langmaid who was a member of my class at Fletcher. He had actually worked for AID between our first and second years on some kind of internship.

Joined USAID and first assignments - 1964

Q: Well then, how did you get into AID? What was the process?

GILBERT: Well, I took the Management Intern Exam.

Q: The Junior Management Intern Exam?

GILBERT: Yes. Not surprisingly, we tended to forget or omit the "junior" part, but I came in as a Junior Management Intern. My first rotation was in the Policy and Planning Coordination (PPC) Bureau. I was located in an Office directed by Clarence Gulick and his deputy, David Cole. My two-month rotation in that office was a wonderful introduction to AID for someone with my background and interests. This was during the time of AID's first Administrator. He had established an advisory panel on international development, which met monthly. Clarence's office was the secretariat for that advisory panel. The membership of this panel consisted of people like Rosenstein-Rodan, Dean Edward Mason of Harvard, a man named Johnson from Columbia Teacher's College who led one of the major sector studies that were launched in the early days of the Nigeria program, etc. As I recall, one of the speakers was Walt Rostow. Others were Ted Schulz (the University of Chicago's famous agricultural economist) and Glenn Johnson (head of the Food Policy Center at Stanford). Given that a meeting was held on the first or second day of my rotation, I was able to attend three meetings of this panel during my two months in PPC. I had the job of writing up the proceedings of the second meeting.

Q: Yes. The AID Administrator was David Bell?

GILBERT: Yes, and it was David E. Bell who chaired most of these meetings. One of those who made presentations was Rosenstein-Rodan. Anyway, it was a panel of the great and the good. Oh, Dean Mason was actually the chair of the group. But David Bell often sat in. And Hollis Chenery was head of PCC then.

Q: Right.

GILBERT: It was a dazzling introduction to AID.

Q: Do you remember anything in particular about the issues or topics they discussed or viewpoints or anything of that sort, or about conclusions that they were drawing about AID's role?

GILBERT: No. I don't. But I'll tell you, having started off that way and having actually studied economic development in graduate school, permanently inoculated me against being overly enthusiastic about the sort of intellectual "fads" that periodically swept over AID and the development community, including the World Bank, during the years that followed.

Q: Why is that?

GILBERT: Well, those discussions, the reading I did in graduate school and the stimuli I received in those early days gave me an unshakable sense that there just aren't any magic bullets. It was strongly instilled in me that every country is unique, even though third world countries tend to share common characteristics, and that a balanced approach has to be taken to development. And, if one donor doesn't support a balanced approach, then the donors as a group need to do so. The host government authorities themselves definitely have to follow a balanced approach to get where they need to go. And it has too often been clear to me that we risked losing sight of the need for balance in practice even if we never abandoned it in principle. The worst thing was that the donors tend to embrace the same fads at more or less the same time, so the collectivity of donors also neglected the need to encourage and support balanced strategies.

Q: Do you have any impressions or a feel for what AID was about or what it was supposed to be or what its development strategy was at that time?

GILBERT: Well, I always thought AID was in the development business, and, that, no matter what we said to Congress about fighting the cold war, development was our real mandate and mission. And I was always very unhappy and dissatisfied and chafed at the way I thought AID pandered to a different view of its mission by justifying a lot of its activities and programs in Cold War terms, vis-à-vis Congress.

Q: In terms of political and security interests...

GILBERT: Yes.

Q: Well, we will come back to that point later. So you were there in PPC only two months?

GILBERT: That's right. So then, after PPC, I went next to the Turkey desk. And the big issue then was the Keban Dam. There were two dams that were being considered. The other was Ciceroz. As part of the preparations for a donor meeting that was scheduled to occur within the next few months, I was asked to write a paper on the Keban Dam and

whether it seemed to make sense. As I recall, I mainly tried to determine whether the demand projections for electric power were realistic.

Q: What did you conclude?

GILBERT: I believe I concluded that the demand projections were reasonable. Now, thinking back on it, I don't think anybody - and certainly I was no exception - was worried about its social or environmental impact. And I'm sure I got so wrapped up in various approaches to the dealing with the demand issue, that I totally neglected the other issues concerning trade-offs and opportunity costs that the project posed. But, my main task was to address the demand issue. There were two huge studies on the Keban and Ciceroz dams and my task was not to critique them in their entirety.

Q: The project went ahead, I guess. Was it an AID project?

GILBERT: I believe it did, and I believe AID participated in the financing.

Q: This was AID funded or multi-donor?

GILBERT: Multi-donor funded.

Completed internship with assignment to the Nigeria Desk - 1964-1966

And then, knowing my third rotational assignment as a junior management intern probably ought to be one where there was a good prospect for a permanent job, I cast about and found that the most interesting opportunity at the time was on the Nigeria Desk. And so I became one of three or four people on the Nigeria desk working under Ralph Fisher.

Q: This was what year?

GILBERT: This was in about April or May of 1964. And it was a very exciting time to be associated with the Nigeria program. It was as if the whole range of the PPC advisory council deliberations concerning global development were being focused on the Nigeria case. At that time in-depth studies were being or had been done on Nigeria's key development sectors. John F. Kennedy had made a pledge of what seemed at the time an enormous amount of funding. And I wish that I could recall for sure the amount.

Q: \$225 million.

GILBERT: It seemed like an astronomical sum at the time. And I guess it was, considering price levels at that time. And a series of sectoral studies had been put in motion. From these studies multi-year sectoral strategies would be developed. They would serve as the basis for programming the \$225 million. As I recall the Nigerians were already "the Nigerians," and they were quite impatient with that approach. Many of them

thought we should just hand them the \$225 million. Notwithstanding this concept, there was already an extensive portfolio of projects that had been started either before the studies or on the assumption that many priorities were beyond doubt.

When I came on the desk, the Africa Bureau and the mission were beginning to sift through these studies. Some were in progress and some were coming out in draft. To use an analogy from British public administration practice, it was as though we - having received the "committee reports" - needed to work through them and frame AID "white papers" for each sector.

Q: Any particular study that stood out in your mind?

GILBERT: No. I mostly remember the ferment. And then I wound up staying on the Nigeria desk.

Q: For how long were you there?

GILBERT: Until September or October of 1966. I remember going out to Nigeria for about six weeks in March or April of 1966. I spent part of that time traveling to the Western, Midwestern, Eastern and Northern Regions (including all the principal cities and universities) to project sites and spending another part of that time in the Lagos office where they were developing a strategy document. I was charged with writing pieces on the investment promotion and enterprise development areas.

Q: That was after the first coup, wasn't it?

GILBERT: Yes. And I'm having a little trouble reconstructing how that worked because I can't imagine there wasn't a mission strategy in place prior to that. Maybe this was a re-fiddling of the strategy that was necessary because of that coup.

Q: But you worked on private investment?

GILBERT: And small enterprise development; these things tended to go together. They were in one office.

Q: Do you remember anything particular about the strategy?

GILBERT: Well, I remember that when I was working on the desk, investment promotion and indigenous enterprise development were part of my "portfolio." Peter Kolar handled agriculture and public administration and somebody else handled education. I remember the Arthur D. Little (ADL) contract for an investment promotion project and an indigenous enterprise development project implemented by AID direct-hire staff that operated in Eastern Nigeria. A man named Virgil Poling conceived the project. A young guy named Peter Kirby was associated with it in the planning phase and went on to

publish quite a bit on subjects related to small enterprise development. Eddie Rothblum was the head of the USAID Nigeria office that managed these activities.

And I guess I really thought that was the answer to the maiden's prayer in those days. And I continue to think that a lot of that was useful. Of course, in those days we were not concerned about the policy framework the way we would be now.

Q: Do you remember anything about it?

GILBERT: Though we still had economists in those days, one didn't hear much discussion about economic policy. AID's main preoccupation in those days was with saving and investment rates. And we certainly didn't expect there to be very much spontaneous private investment or private savings in a country like Nigeria at that time. Though we were preoccupied with the need to raise the savings and investment rates, we thought of that problem in terms of programs and training rather than incentives to investors and rewards to savers.

Q: Anything else about your work in Nigeria?

GILBERT: I guess I remember how terrible I thought our programming methods were in those days.

Q: In what respect?

GILBERT: Well, things weren't really "projectized," they were sort of "theme-ized." You know, there was an investment promotion project and there was the indigenous industries project. And yes, these were projects, but there was very little definition of what they consisted of and how much money they should have over what period of time. There were loose ideas about these things, but there was very little systematic documentation of these parameters and nobody felt particularly committed to abide by them. So every year there would be a scramble to see how much money you could have for this, that and the other thing. As I recall, it was a very fluid and very frustrating process. And it depended a lot upon personalities, influence and pressures. There was precious little in the way of rules or standards that had to be observed in processing and justifying changes in project parameters.

Q: Okay. Then, you left in 1966.

First overseas assignment to the USAID Mission in Ghana - 1966-1971

GILBERT: I went to Ghana.

Q: And what was your assignment there?

GILBERT: I was the Assistant Program Officer to begin with. And I also ran a training operation. We didn't have a Training Officer. Gordon Evans was the Program Officer.

Frank Pinder was the Mission Director. I don't think there was a Deputy. I never worked so hard in my life as during those four years. It was especially tough at the beginning. I was spending just about every waking moment in the office and trying to convince people that we needed a Training Officer.

Q: What characterized the training program. What were you trying to do, what was the point of it?

GILBERT: You know, I don't clearly remember. There was project-related training for most projects. There was also some training that was funded out of special accounts or regional projects such as AFGRAD and ASPAU. I'm not sure I accurately remember what those initials stand for, but the former was for post-graduate and the latter for undergraduate education. AFGRAD was very competitive and ASPAU probably was also. Over the years I met and often worked with a lot of the people who returned from AFGRAD training. In my experience all of them were extremely capable and well trained. Any many made really important contributions.

Q: In large numbers?

GILBERT: The numbers weren't large - probably fewer than ten new starts per year for a country like Ghana. But they were significant and the associated workload wasn't particularly visible. A fair amount of processing and related liaison was required for each participant in order to make sure they got passport pictures taken, got certification as participant trainees so that the right visas could be issued, got in to see the consular officer, etc.

Then, thank heavens, one day Frank Pinder, a lovely man and quite a tough one, went in to my office after hours and did something of desk audit on me. And he concluded that I should have a Training Officer. After that my life improved quite a bit.

We didn't have a U.S. direct-hire economist, but we had an FSN economist whom I supervised. One of his chief duties was to prepare a report every year on Government of Ghana public finances. Getting him to produce product that we could present with a straight face for clearance by the Embassy Economics Officer was a nightmare. It was only in about 1968 that my life was further improved by the assignment of a Program Economist.

One of my first Ghana memories was that Gordon Evans handed me an airgram about the idea of a smallpox-measles program. He said, in effect, "I don't know what this is, but figure out what to do with it." When I finally found time to flip through it, my reaction was that it was an unrealistic, lobby-driven initiative from left field. It certainly hadn't followed a normal path through the AID programming process (not that there was much definition of that). CDC (then that stood for Communicable Diseases Center) and WHO were the instigators, and there had surely been some communications from either Washington or Atlanta with the Ghanaians because one day a wonderful man named Dr.

Frank Grant (a Ghanaian) from the Ministry of Health came by and wanted to talk about smallpox and measles.

Q: The first African epidemiologist.

GILBERT: I don't recall his specialty but that makes sense. He also had a message and said, "Maybe we should talk about this." That was a pain in the neck - it meant that I REALLY had to read the damn thing. It was clear that this wasn't something that would go away if we scoffed. It was coming at us a hundred miles an hour, and we really had to get moving even though we already had too much on our plates. And nobody else on either his side or mine could focus on the matter. So the two of us sat down and "whomped up" an agreement for an activity financed by AID, sponsored by WHO and implemented by CDC - thus fitting no model or guidance available in the Manual Orders - and got it signed with precious little fanfare - or, at least, none that I recall. And that exercise turned out ultimately to be a good, even fun, experience since Frank Grant was such a good guy.

And then, lo and behold, all kinds of crazy things started happening. People started arriving. Soon CDC people were working out of a local office in close collaboration with the Health Ministry to implement the program. And that turned out to be one of the most successful things we've ever done.

Now that I think back, I remember being sent in the summer of 1966 to CDC in Atlanta to brief a group of field officers who were to be stationed in Africa. These people turned out, in most cases, to be the staff of the Smallpox-Measles Program. Yet the Smallpox-Measles Program, per se, was a surprise. I wonder now what I was told their exact functions were to be. I think I had the impression that their main function would be liaison and epidemiological cooperation with national authorities and regional bodies.

And that illustrates why being an Assistant Program Officer was always interesting; if you had enough energy and stamina, you were the de facto head of a one-person "Office of Miscellaneous Affairs." And everything that other people didn't quite know what to do with, or didn't want to deal with, found its way to your desk. And, as with the embryonic Smallpox-Measles Program, one often had a frightening degree of latitude because no one else could focus on such matters.

I guess the next such thing that came along was population and family planning.

Q: How did that get started?

GILBERT: I'm not quite sure of the chronology, but I do remember that sometime during the summer or spring of 1967 I had to go to a population conference in Monrovia. That was just when Jane and our first and second sons went back to the States so that Jane could give birth to our third son. (I remember sending a couple of toys to them courtesy of someone in Monrovia who was to board their Pan Am flight when it transited Roberts

Field.) Ray Ravenholt and Philander Claxton were there. Ravenholt was AID's head of population and family planning. I think that Claxton was responsible for that subject in the State Department. I think that we had been getting messages on this. One of them called for an assessment of the population and family planning situation in Ghana.

Q: Were there any programs in that area in Ghana at that time?

GILBERT: Certainly there were not government programs. The Ghana Planned Parenthood Association (GPPA) existed and had, I believe, been getting some pretty modest financing from international bodies such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and/or U.S. groups such as the Margaret Sanger Foundation. The GPPA was a private operation whose membership was mainly confined to a very few, somewhat "garden society-type" Ghanaians. As I remember it, the Ministry of Health and/or the Medical School of the University of Ghana, from whose staff its leadership was drawn, permitted the GPPA to use certain clinics after official hours.

Q: Do you remember sending anybody on a training program on population matters?

GILBERT: I think I recall that some of the doctors and nurses in GPPA had traveled to the U.S. under Margaret Sanger sponsorship for training on loop insertion, etc. I think that I had to facilitate the arrangements.

Let me rummage through my memories and see what else turns up. We were asked to do some kind of an assessment, and I think it was before I went to the Monrovia conference. Dr. Julius (Bud) Prince had come out to have a look at possible areas. He and I contacted a lot of people who were involved in family planning and the GPPA.

I remember that it involved people at the Medical School. The most important of these was Fred Sai, the Professor of Preventive and Social Medicine. Dr. Bentsi-Enchill, the Professor of Obstetrics, was another. And it involved people in the Department of Sociology, especially the Demographic Unit, at the University of Ghana.

And out of those discussions came some ideas. One of these led to the Danfa Project. Another concerned a demographic sample survey that Sammy K. Gaisie wanted to do. As I recall, Sammy had something quite modest in mind that Bud pounced on it and encouraged him to expand it to a scale that would produce findings relevant to national planning and policy development. And so began a dialogue on the demographic survey. Bud arranged for a guy named Abner Hurwitz (from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) to come out to work with Sammy. Ab was a sampling expert and helped Sammy with that aspect of the survey design. In those days, it would have been normal for AID to assign a U.S. advisor to watch over and support something as sophisticated as this was shaping up to be. Ab, who saw clearly what an exceptionally mature and disciplined scholar Sammy Gaisie was, said this was not necessary. He said that it would be sufficient that he visit Ghana for a few weeks every 90 days or so to check on progress and provide any corrective input that might be needed. This was viewed in some quarters as bordering on

irresponsible, and I recall its being repeatedly questioned. The Demographic Survey was a complete success. It made Sammy Gaisie's reputation, and he went on to have an international career like many well-educated Ghanaians of his generation. He was extremely grateful for being given that opportunity and wrote a very touching tribute to Abner Hurwitz in the preface to the Ph.D. thesis that emerged from that research.

Q: This was a general demographic survey, or a survey of what?

GILBERT: It was a national demographic survey that illuminated the dynamics of the population in a way that wasn't possible based on any complete census. And there was a terrific amount of resistance to it in some quarters.

It was a real revelation to me to watch what happened as we tried to develop this idea. We saw a degree of professional jealousy and rivalry that I would not have credited had I not seen it myself. I soon came to realize that this was largely a function of the penury that pervaded the Ghana public service then. It was also due to a tendency — perhaps, culturally derived — of the concerned parties to see the world as a zero-sum game. Sammy needed access to not-yet-published census data in order to design his sampling framework. The responsible professional at the Central Bureau of Statistics didn't have the staff or the funds for some things that he wanted to do with this data. At the very least, he thought that all chance of his plans going forward would be lost if Sammy got at it. Most probably, as a Ph.D. demographer himself (and a well qualified one, at that, who had gained a good reputation for his administration of the Census Unit), he may also have feared that Sammy's reputation would eclipse his own. From the fuss and the resistance one might have supposed the stakes were life and death. I'm not sure what we did to gain the cooperation Sammy needed from the Central Bureau of Statistics, but it probably involved a certain amount of "bribery" in the form of staff training and commodity support. Anyway Sammy got what he needed and the survey went forward.

I saw this "zero-sum game" behavior often during my later career. I never had time to analyze whether it was rational or irrational behavior on the part of the antagonists. It is a chilling thought, but I think one can probably demonstrate that it is rational at the level of real politik.

Q: And the government supported going ahead with the Demographic Survey?

GILBERT: Well, one could say that there was a green light and some collaboration from government agencies, notably the Ministry of Education. Primary and middle school (but not secondary school) teachers were used as enumerators. Why not secondary teachers? One of the fascinating things I learned about sample surveys was that one needs enumerators who are literate and conscientious, but not too intelligent or sophisticated. If you get people who are too intelligent, it is almost inevitable that difficulties will result. Among the "sophisticates" there are bound to be some who will interpret and improve ("spin") respondents' answers or even resort to outright falsification of questionnaires in

lieu of actually conducting the interviews. Human nature is the same among the non-sophisticates, but their misdeeds are easier to detect.

So the demographic sample survey went forward.

Q: And that resulted in one of the first demographic sample surveys?

GILBERT: I believe it was the first; failing that, it was certainly the most ambitious.

Q: This was countrywide?

GILBERT: Countrywide. It was countrywide in that there were, say, 12 sample areas and they were in the key demographic and cultural zones in the country.

Q: It wasn't a census.

GILBERT: It was a sample survey that couldn't have been done had a complete census not been done earlier. The census was needed to provide a framework for drawing the sample.

Q: This was focused on what?

GILBERT: On population dynamics: i.e., death rates, birth rates, family size, age structure of the population and also some KAP (knowledge, attitudes and practices) content such as desired family size, knowledge of and attitudes toward contraception.

Q: So it was family planning related?

GILBERT: Yes. One of the surprising things was that most younger women's desired family size was something like eight kids. And some women wanted to space their births a little but they sure as heck didn't want small families. Anyway planning also began on the Danfa Project.

Q: What is the Danfa Project as you saw it at that time?

GILBERT: It focused on districts or subdistricts a bit north of Legon, not too far from the University of Ghana. And the idea was to introduce different mixes of health education, primary care and family planning services into three treatment areas. There was a fourth untreated area that served as a control. A great deal of health and demographic data was collected for analysis. The aim was to reach conclusions based on comparisons of family planning acceptance rates, fertility rates and health status indicators as to which combination of treatments was the most cost-effective.

Q: In terms of providing family-planning services, is that what you mean?

GILBERT: Yes, the design that AID bought into emphasized the goal of identifying the most cost-effective method of encouraging and supporting family planning among rural populations. For example, of the three treatment areas, I think one received only family planning education in the context of health education, a second got that plus primary health care while a third was showered with primary care, health/family planning education and family planning services. As I recall, no area received family planning services alone since that was simply “unacceptable.” So the concept was centered on family planning but only in a broader health services and health education context. But as the design and implementation processes unfolded, the agenda became more and more elaborate. This was one of the first projects that I can remember where a university was given the go-ahead, subject to certain budgetary and conceptual constraints, to design a project that it would also implement. It may have been at the beginning of Title XII. Al Newman was the overall leader of this process.

Q: Of UCLA?

GILBERT: Yes, the School of Public Health. An obstetrician Jerry Niswanger led a small project design team. The first Chief of Party during the implementation phase was Dr. Irv Lourie. And as things went along, the project turned out to be much more statistically and operationally elaborate than envisioned. I left while the project was still quite young, but I definitely had the feeling that the project agenda grew "like Topsy". I wouldn't say that we were betrayed or snookered, but I would say it is a classic example of two phenomena. One is that things always turn out to be more complicated than one thinks as the outset. The more the experts got into the design and implementation of the project, the more things they found to look into or to guard against. The other phenomenon is that coalition building is essential to moving a program like Danfa forward. Coalitions form around agendas. It is very rare that an agenda can remain stable or pure as a coalition expands. The Ghanaians' original concept of Danfa was extremely modest, but couldn't remain so. And, the world is probably better because it didn't.

Q: Fred Sai was the head of the medical school, I guess, at that time.

GILBERT: He was the Professor of Preventive and Social Medicine.

Q: That is right. What was his idea originally? He was the one who originally started the Danfa Center?

GILBERT: Fred and his people conceived the project, and it was under his department. When we first talked to him he had something much simpler in mind, and I believe it was operating in a very embryonic form. As I recall, they were mainly focused on primary care and health education. They used the center as a practical training site. They may have been thinking of also developing a model rural health structure. But he didn't have funding and AID did. And we wanted to promote family planning. So I think Bud Prince drew him toward emphasizing the family planning aspect, which was pretty secondary if not tertiary until then. So the agenda shifted toward family planning when the Department

of Preventive and Social Medicine entered into a coalition with the AID Africa Bureau. When UCLA joined the coalition the agenda shifted heavily toward research and from a narrow to a broader research focus.

And about when the Danfa Project was getting launched the Ford Foundation assigned Gordon Perkin to be resident Family Planning Advisor in Accra. The Ford Foundation had previously sent a number of people out to do some very good studies. One of these involved preparation by a Ford expert of a draft Government Population Policy. Gordon arrived about when agreement had been reached on the policy document. His job was to work with the planning group in the Ministry of Economy and Plan (or words to that effect) on how it should be implemented. Gordon and I began to meet frequently, including for lunch at the Maharajah Restaurant every Friday, to share information and ideas. We were natural allies, and neither of us had much of anyone else to talk to about population and family planning. A key issue at this time was how a government population and family planning program should be structured and who should be responsible for it. This, and the question of how we could encourage and support its development, preoccupied us for months and months.

On the Ghanaian side, Fred Sai, when he was Head of Preventive and Social Medicine at the University, was a pioneering supporter of family planning and one of Gordon's key interlocutors and collaborators. And out of our discussions came a shared concept of what we were working toward as well as a division of labor between AID and the Ford Foundation. Our vision was that Ford would take the lead in making punctual or targeted inputs of technical assistance that were so important to helping the Ghanaians clarify and elaborate their plans and programs. The Ford Foundation had only modest amounts of money, but they had a diversified stable of highly competent specialists in all areas of population and family planning and were nimble in a way that AID could never hope to match. On the other hand, AID potentially had significant resources available to provide sustained and substantial support to the implementation of Ghanaian programs once formulated. And I was writing up a longer-term program of support for the central government level population and family planning program that seemed to be emerging from the dialogue between Gordon and his colleagues with the Ministry of Economy and Plan on behalf of the Government. That ministry had been taking the lead on population matters. The Ministry of Health's leadership at that time had little or no interest in family planning.

Q: So Fred Sai wasn't in the Government?

GILBERT: Yes and no. He moved over to become Chief Medical Officer in the Ministry of Health (equivalent to Principal Secretary) while all this was in process.

He was still at the University while Gordon and I were doing most of our planning and design work. Gordon was working primarily with people in the Ministry of Economics and Plan - mainly with the planning and analytical staff, but also getting input from time to time from the overall Principal Secretary, B.K. Mensah. I believe the Principal

Secretary for Donor Coordination, Harry Nelson, was also tracking these things as was the Commissioner, E.N. Omaboe. Their Ministry, and Omaboe in particular, had taken the first initiative in seeking help on population matters from the Ford Foundation and others because they could see that Ghana's development prospects were threatened by its population trends.

So, out of our work came an AID project proposal that involved a certain amount of technical advisory, training and financial support for a National Family Planning Program. It was to be conducted on an inter-ministerial basis under the coordination of a family planning secretariat located in the Ministry of Economy and Plan. This latter feature had been advocated by Fred Sai who said that the program should not under any circumstances be in the Ministry of Health because it would always be treated like a branch of the national pharmaceutical system in charge of a dangerous drug - something to be managed very cautiously, not to say timidly.

Q: Right.

GILBERT: So, just about the time the ink was dry on the proposals that went into Washington on this, Fred Sai was named Chief Medical Officer in the Ministry of Health. And that is where I learned in practical terms that "Where you sit is where you stand." And from that time on, Fred Sai began to lobby against the National Family Planning Program idea. He and Al Newman began to advocate the Danfa Project as a model for bringing family planning to everybody – not just the rural population - through the Ministry of Health. And overnight the idea of an inter-ministerial National Family Planning Program with a secretariat in the Ministry of Economy and Plan became anathema to Fred. For our part, Gordon and I would never have disputed that the Danfa Project could contribute importantly to effective to the development of a rural health structure to reach the average Ghanaian with health, including family planning, services. But, meanwhile, there was a great need for straight family planning information and services among urban and modern sector people. The Ministry of Health, we knew, would take forever to notice, let alone respond to, to this need. We could see no reason for the provision of family planning information and services to this population to be restricted to Ministry of Health channels.

So, just about when the project proposal that represented Gordon's and my thinking landed in Washington, this turn-around happened. And there was obviously some back (or maybe "front" from their point of view!) channel communications among the health folks in the Ghana Government and AID/Washington to which I was not privy. Fred Sai and Al Newman made a few trips back and forth between the U.S. and Ghana during this time. I began to realize from the kind of questions that were raised and the way my answers weren't listened to that Al and Fred were busy lobbying in the African Bureau against the project proposal that I had prepared and the Mission had submitted. And so nothing was done for over a year. I don't think AID assistance really came on stream for the National Family Planning Program in Ghana until shortly after I was transferred to Ghana.

Q: Was there any national policy on family planning and population?

GILBERT: A policy document was developed with help from the Ford Foundation, and I'm pretty sure that it was promulgated after inevitable delays. The National Family Planning Secretariat was set up, and a guy named Dr. A.A. Armah became the first head of it. And there was an inauguration of this sometime during late 1970. It was held at State House. The police band played, and it was quite an elegant affair.

Q: I came in the fall.

GILBERT: You were there, I think, by then. Looking around at that inauguration observance, I couldn't help but reflect on what large changes had occurred in the status and profile of family planning during my time there. When I first arrived in Ghana people literally spoke about family planning in hushed tones and as though it were an indecent topic. But U.S. support didn't come on stream when it was needed. And so the secretariat just kind of dangled and spun its wheels. And, frankly, I think it was one of the worst AID foul ups that I ever witnessed.

We are all products of our experience, and this was a bitter experience for me. This is where I began to be highly skeptical of AID's and, especially, of AID Washington's ability to be serious about development or follow-through on its own policies, not to mention the various "emphases" that it promulgated with such tiresome regularity. The damage to the National Family Planning Program was irretrievable because the push that would have imparted needed momentum never came. And the people in the Secretariat had enemies. And one of the most implacable was the new Chief Medical Officer who regarded Dr. Armah, the head of the Secretariat, as an ungrateful former protégé and upstart.

And once the Secretariat was born weak, all those whose cooperation was needed thought its functions, and the resource allocations that potentially would go with them, were up for grabs. So we saw the old zero-sum game mentality come into full play. And Dr. Armah didn't cover himself with glory. He was not an attractive figure, and he showed no flair or creativity in dealing with the challenges he faced. But, in fairness, we'll never know whether anyone could have played the poor hand he was dealt much better. His approach was to circle the wagons and go off the deep end in asserting his de jure role as inter-ministerial coordinator. The Secretariat was actively opposed and thwarted at every turn by the Ministry of Health and other interests. As far as I could determine after I left Ghana, the National Family Planning Program had a pretty troubled life. It is easy to criticize Armah, but I'm not sure that anyone could have done much better. And sometimes there is a basis for the paranoia that can push someone who is "susceptible" over the edge into a disproportionate response. I thought it was a little like Nkrumah going off the deep end after independence. When he promulgated the Preventive Detention Act, it was in response to plots that really could have toppled his Government. And that made the plotters all the more determined and Nkrumah all the more dictatorial.

The bitterness I felt at witnessing this mess in the population sphere was compounded by the fact that it coincided with mismanagement of economic policy. And I had been so hopeful about Ghana's prospects...

Q: Let's pause for a minute and go back a minute and talk a little about what was the situation in Ghana at that time.

GILBERT: Well, it was the first time I had ever seen a scarcity economy. You could hardly ever find anything but the bare staples - the minimum necessities of life - in the stores. I remember two things vividly. One is that we had a big, dry lawn. Nobody had lived in the house we were assigned to for maybe six months before our arrival. It took me several weeks to buy and splice together enough sections of hose to make a hose that was long enough to water our lawn and garden.

It took me a very long time to assure myself of a supply of beer. You could buy beer but you had to turn in empties each time because there was a serious shortage of beer bottles. Another guy and I discovered that if you bought beer by the case they would accept your turning in a case of empties lacking two bottles (you paid for the missing ones). But if you lacked three, it was no dice. So we began a process that I referred to as "breeding" beer bottles. For a long time we would hold back two empties from each case handed in until a newcomer — beginning with me — could get his very own, very precious case of empties. And this is how I was finally able get back to buying beer without the help from my friends — a threshold I thought I had crossed for good on reaching my 21st birthday.

Before joining AID I had received a pretty extensive training in economics, including economic history and comparative economics. (In retrospect, my education in this area continued throughout my time in Ghana.) And I really came to Ghana believing that a liberal socialist model for running an economy could be made to work. It was obvious that the economy was in terrible shape, but I wasn't ready to conclude that the whole thing had been doomed from its conception as opposed to simply having been screwed up by people who were either incompetent or wrongly motivated. However, my view on this changed during my years in Ghana.

Q: What was the political situation at the time?

GILBERT: In January 1996 there had been a coup against President-for-Life Kwame Nkrumah. This brought a junta of army and police officers to power. They announced that they would hand the country back to civilian rule in three years and launched a program of economic stabilization and reform. They placed economic policy in the hands of E.N. Omaboe, previously the Chief Government Statistician. After rather rushed consultations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Omaboe came up with what seemed at the time like a very good program.

Q: Economic program?

GILBERT: Yes, an economic stabilization program. And they quickly got support from the IMF and the World Bank as well as the U.S. government and other donors. And this support remained strong throughout most of my time at Ghana. It began to wear thin during my last months there – late 1970 to early 1971.

And I would have to say that it was a very good show in many ways. They launched an "essential imports program" that reduced total imports significantly. And they carried out a public sector retrenchment exercise coupled with a labor-intensive public works - mainly feeder roads - rehabilitation program. I believe they called this a public sector labor redeployment scheme. And to help in controlling inflation, they had one currency reform and at least one devaluation.

And then they began to “spin off” state enterprises. AID's assistance portfolio included a Commodity Import Program, which actually provided foreign exchange through the banking system to importers who could plausibly buy their intermediate goods or raw materials from U.S. suppliers. All of this was carried out within the framework of import licensing and foreign exchange controls as well as price controls and subsidized bank interest rates that remained little changed from Nkrumah's day. But very little was said about that in the first 18 months after the coup. And I really believe all of us - except a few hopeless cynics - really had a sense of excitement and high purpose. We believed we were participating in a turning point in Ghanaian history.

But it didn't turn out that way.

Q: They were also moving toward elections at that time.

GILBERT: Well that is right, and their timing was a key factor in determining the outcome of the economic program. The NLC had pledged an early return to civilian rule, and it gradually came to be understood that this should happen after they had been in power about three years - i.e., in 1969. They had planned elections in 1968, I think. Or was it 1969?

Q: 1969.

GILBERT: Yes, 1969. There had been a coup attempt in 1967 that was interpreted by some as an attempt to exploit impatience with the austerity of the NLC's stabilization program. As the time for the elections drew nearer, the NLC seemed less intent on straightening out the economy and more committed to ensuring that the 1969 elections wouldn't produce a return of Nkrumah's people and policies. Although the economy had improved during the NLC period, it only progressed from horrible to very bad. For example, the government never did manage to restore the economy to normal functioning. This was because they had to force imports down to a volume that permitted neither the importation nor the local production of a normal range and volume of consumer goods. And this was a matter of forcing balance by restrictive import licensing and foreign exchange controls. These allocations had relatively little to do with economic efficiency.

To the extent they sustained economic activity rather than consumption, they mainly supported the largely inefficient state-owned import-competing manufacturing sector. Because production and income increased only slightly and the Government raised public sector wages in 1967, government revenues remained insufficient to cover anything like normal operating expenses. Just about every action that the government needed to take in support of the agriculture sector misfired. A common ingredient in each instance was the insufficiency of government operating funds and foreign exchange. Thus fertilizer and other inputs never arrived until after the growing season, roads didn't receive maintenance in time to prevent their washing out during the rainy season. Except in a few areas (Ghana Airways, the State Transport bus line, radio, television) public sector equipment was non-operational or highly unreliable. Every time we wanted to take a field trip with our counterparts, we had to cover their expenses with project funds. It never occurred to the government - or with much force to the donor community until rather late in the NLC's tenure - that it might make sense to give greater scope for markets to allocate resources and for the private sector to play a markedly larger role in the economy.

But anticipation of the 1969 election was a significant influence on the NLC's management of the economy.

Q: Did the U.S. provide any support for the election?

GILBERT: If they did, I didn't know about it or, at least, I wasn't involved. Do you know anything about that?

Q: Yes. We provided assistance for registration and ID cards.

GILBERT: Oh yes. Now I remember reading about it, and it was caught up in some kind of...

Q: ...shenanigans. The contractors were supplying photographic process equipment for their ID cards.

GILBERT: Anyway the politics of the electoral campaign were quite nasty. It was really amazing to me to talk to some of my Ghanaian friends. One of the two major parties contesting the 1969 election - I think it was called the Progress Party - represented the better element of the Nkrumah forces. It was headed Komla Gbedemah, who had been Nkrumah's Finance Minister until he resigned on principle. The other important party was that headed by Professor K.A. Busia. It represented the people who regarded themselves as the natural leaders of the country. They tended to come from privileged, and often chiefly, backgrounds and were often highly educated and very impressive people. Talking about the election and the two parties with my Ghanaian friends - who were mostly from elite backgrounds - was disconcerting. They saw the contest as one between the forces of good and evil. They couldn't say enough about the wickedness of the Gbedemah party and believed that an election result that produced victory for them would be unacceptable and couldn't be allowed to stand. Busia himself was a man of powerful intellect, but rather priggish and cold. He was inclined to prattle on about democracy and the rule of law. He

certainly had few of the attributes of a popular leader. He gave the impression that the main question to be decided by the election was his own and his party's suitability or worthiness and their opponents' lack of it. The Busia forces won the election and then proceeded to provide the country with poor government complete with flouting of the constitution and the rights of the opposition members of the Parliament.

But before all that happened the prospect of the 1969 elections had a negative impact on NLC economic policies. I believe it's fair to say that men who favored the Busia forces dominated the NLC. Certainly the majority didn't want the other side to win. And I think they did the classic thing. They eased up on the austerity aspect of the economic program. Even though the allocation of import licenses and foreign exchange increasingly favored imports of consumer goods, inflation increased, and it became more and more apparent that the economy was slipping more and more out of balance.

And this trend continued after the Busia government came into power. The Harvard planning advisory group had been saying from the beginning that a major devaluation together with liberalizing reforms were urgently needed. They and, I believe, the "vanguard" of the donor community tried to convince the Busia government that this should be done early, during its honeymoon phase, when it would go down easier and they would have longer to reap the reward of an improved economy. But they would have none of it. Meanwhile the economy got worse and worse. This continued until...

Q: January 1972.

GILBERT: That's right. I was in Nigeria by then. But the devaluation occurred during the holiday season. There was precious little advance planning; I believe the Harvard team was even caught quite by surprise. One of the glaring errors was that the devaluation was only announced, not really explained to the country. This triggered a coup. And so not even two years after the return to civilian rule, Ghana found itself again ruled by a military junta, and by one whose members fell considerably short of matching the NLC in ability and unselfishness.

Having taken my generals and being thus eligible to do so, I had been thinking about writing a doctoral dissertation on some aspect of the attempt to restart economic development in Ghana. I had been reading and considering various topics, but had not managed to develop a proposal that both had scholarly merit and feasibility in terms of the availability of data, magnitude of the task, etc.

That was the state of play when I was assigned to Nigeria. When I discovered there that my work was at least as demanding as it had been in Ghana, I dithered for six months and then threw up my hands. I wrote to my thesis committee at Fletcher to thank them for their patience (they had extended my eligibility) and formally renounced my intent to prepare a thesis. Rob West, my thesis director, was a Fletcher professor who had been Mission Director in Congo a few years earlier. I thought he would thank me for being so straightforward about the matter, but instead he used a visit to Lagos on some other

business to also cajole me into staying the course. I owe him a great deal for that. But the other reason I persevered was that my Ghana experience nagged at me. It was my first practical experience as a development practitioner (or, more accurately, a witness), and I wanted to understand what had gone wrong in Ghana during this period and what lessons could be drawn from the experience.

So thanks to a then brand new element in AID's staff training program, I was given six months at Fletcher with pay to do research and writing. I took an additional three months of leave without pay to complete a full academic year. That was during the academic year 1973/74.

Q: What was your dissertation on?

GILBERT: Well, the title was "The Distributive Effects of Economic Policy during a Period of Stabilization and Reform: Ghana 1966-1969". And one of the first things I discovered was that I didn't have a good fix at all at the time on whether the stabilization program was on track. And, unless I was completely out of the loop, the same was also true of the other staff in the USAID Mission. This could be seen in the statistics that were available four or five years later but not then. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund probably knew more at the time because they typically get access to statistics long before they are published for public consumption. Be that as it may, AID and the other donors - whatever their misgivings - had little choice but to base their decisions on how much or little confidence they had in the information and analysis provided by the Bank and Fund.

With hindsight, you could see that the program was slipping off track by late 1967. I didn't think to look at this again before I came down here. But I divided it into two periods. During the first period they stayed largely on track. I think that period ended in the fall of 1967. And you could see that from then on the benefits of economic policy decisions favored efficient resource use less and less and furthered political and social objectives more and more. I don't think the change in economic decision-making had much to do with explicit corruption - at least, not in the upper echelons of the government.

The elections and the consequent desire to ease austerity was only part of the picture. Equally or more important, in my view, is the degree to which this particular military government was subject to "popular" political and social pressure. In truth the pressure probably came mainly from the elites, the urban middle class and modern sector wage earners.

Drawing on Sammy Gaisie's demographic survey results, I could appreciate how few people at each age-level there were in Ghana who completed secondary and higher levels of education. Most of those who subsequently gained standing in the public service or in the commercial life of the country had attended five or six elite secondary schools, of which at least three are located in Cape Coast. After that, many would have attended the

University of Ghana or the Kumasi University of Science and Technology. Thus, in Ghana the elite were absolutely as well as relatively few, had shared many life experiences and were very likely to know one another directly or by name and reputation or by knowing the family to which an individual belonged. In such a society one of the most commonly heard conversational themes among the elite is that an individual knows someone in a position of influence who can broker a solution to some problem or other. Moreover, the NLC had set a timetable for elections leading to a return to civilian government. And, as I mentioned earlier, a majority among them wished to see the anti-Nkrumah party come to power. So, even though no military government can be called democratic, it seems to me that the NLC was representative in the sense that circumstances required it to take account of, and factor into their decisions, pressures and constraints arising from public opinion. In this way, they were not in a very different position from that of an elected government facing an election. Little by little, they gave way to interest group pressures from upper and middle ranges of the socioeconomic scale. Perhaps, just perhaps, if they had been clearly aware how much the cumulative effect of some of these decisions would cost in foregone economic stabilization and reform, then they might have actually steered a somewhat different course. But they were individually ill equipped to gauge what was happening, and it is doubtful that any technocrats who might have understood were sufficiently disinterested and “staunch” to tell them what they probably didn't want to hear. Most NLC members saw their mission as mainly one of putting an end to “wickedness” and corruption that occurred because the wrong element of society - the “half-educated,” “upstart” people who predominated among those attracted to Nkrumah – gained power following independence. For these members improving economic conditions was essential to the political aim of preventing history from repeating itself. For them the need for economic reform and restructuring was something like a religious verity that they needed to acknowledge though they hardly understood it in practical terms. It was analogous to “Mom, God and apple pie.”

Q: Did you have any views in your thesis about what policies might have been appropriate for better distribution and all that? Or was that not what you were focusing on?

GILBERT: Well, from an economic perspective one could see that opening things up to the market would have been better. They also should have been more ruthless in getting out of state enterprises instead of allowing that element of their program to stall after two or three relatively inconsequential spinoffs. And if they had handled those decisions more transparently, the question of privatization might not have become too hot to handle.

In particular, they should have been more ruthless in getting out of the import-competing manufacturing sector - either letting it sink or swim. And they should have been much more aggressive in promoting agriculture through a combination of economic incentives and liberalization of markets as well as privatization of agricultural processing and input distribution functions. A lot of these ideas were “out there”; I surely didn't invent them. But nobody in the World Bank or in AID was talking about them that much in those days as I recall. There were consultants in the picture - people like Scott Pearson, Gus Ranis

and the members of the Harvard Team who were talking and writing about these needs - but I think it fair to say that the Ghanaians studiously, though politely, ignored them most of the time. Neither the World Bank nor the Fund openly advocated putting much pressure on the government to adopt more far-reaching reforms. To make them politically feasible would have required developing sensitive policies and implementation strategies in secret from the public but in close collaboration with the donor representatives. This would have required stronger Ghanaian economic analytical and decision-making capacities as well as more trust and frankness than actually prevailed between the Ghanaian authorities and the World Bank and the Fund. It would also have required more resources than the donors were then furnishing. Moreover, the Bank and Fund may have sensed a donor consensus that the outcome of the 1969 elections, rather than that of the economic program, was the main concern.

We need to recall that these issues were coming to a head at a time when AID was on the threshold of a decision to reduce its economics staff and rely instead on the Bank and the Fund for economic analysis and related program guidance. At the same time AID, the Bank and many other donors decided to focus assistance on the poor majority - a concept that swiftly degenerated, at least within AID, to become a preoccupation in the minds of many with "the poorest of the poor." And AID essentially went on an "autopilot" ...

Q: As far as economic policy...

GILBERT: As far as economic policy issues figuring in program decisions was concerned.

Q: Were there any other program areas that you worked on while you were there? You mentioned population and training...and what else?

GILBERT: I also wound up being tapped to be the Evaluation Officer in Ghana. As I remember, I wasn't able to do much with that portfolio in Ghana, although I do remember writing a paper on monitoring and evaluation that was published in the proceedings of a symposium on population and demographic issues. I just had too much on my plate, and - since AID was just formulating its approach - there was little actual doctrine to guide a new evaluation officer. I think being named evaluation officer mainly meant that one was required to undergo training in AID's evolving methodology.

Q: What was the mission doing during those years? What was the strategy generally? What were we trying to do? You mentioned population — that is fine. What about any other areas?

GILBERT: Well, counterpart local currency funds were used to support a labor-intensive feeder roads rehabilitation program. It was in the hands of one of the talented de Graft-Johnson clan on the Ghanaian side.

Q: What were you doing in agriculture?

GILBERT: Oh, yeah! Gee, agriculture! In agriculture we had a program focused, in effect, on extension. We also had an agricultural education program that trained non-degree extension people. We were involved in five or six agricultural training schools around the country. We also had people working in several regional offices as advisors to the extension service. And, after I had been in country for a while, I formed a strong impression that our people were simply helping the Ministry of Agriculture to do a little of this and that. This was when the miracle rice and wheat varieties were making such an impact in Southern Asia and the Far East. And some of the new rice varieties were undergoing adaptive trials in Ghana. I believe there were also some significantly higher-yielding maize varieties being tried out. Meanwhile it seemed that extension service was simply marking time. Bob Jackson and I...

Q: He was the Ag Officer?

GILBERT: The Ag Officer. He was one of the best I've ever seen. It is too bad when you meet a guy like Bob Jackson early in your career. Bob makes me think of our cook-steward in Ghana, Jonathan Tonaria, an Ijaw from Nigeria. He was certainly one of the two best cook-stewards that we ever had. And I didn't appreciate either Jonathan or Bob Jackson then as much as I would later when I discovered what rare jewels they each were.

I worked closely with Bob in developing an idea that we came to call the "Focus and Concentrate" approach. (Some wags soon dubbed it "Search and Destroy" after a military program in Vietnam.) At that time we had an extension project that involved encouraging farmers to plant certain improved varieties, to use certain fertilizer applications and to follow certain methods of cultivation (called cultural practices, by the technicians). But all this was pretty theoretical since half the time neither the recommended seeds nor the right kinds and amounts of fertilizer were available. If that weren't enough, the extension officers often weren't disseminating the currently approved advice. Of course, they mostly couldn't get out and give demonstrations and provide advice - whether correct or incorrect - because they didn't have working vehicles and, if they did, couldn't get the funds they needed to operate them. Per Diem was out of the question. I'm sure I'm forgetting the half of it.

So, we decided to select one district in each of the four regions that we were involved in and make a point of getting all the elements together in these districts so that we could demonstrate the benefits that would accrue. We also thought that trying to make this work in four "focus and concentrate" areas would yield lessons that would enable replication to proceed more efficiently later on. As this implies, we knew that there would be problems to learn from. But we underestimated the difficulties enormously.

We worked at this for several years. We - at least some of us (but probably not Bob Jackson) - thought we could make it work if we tried hard enough. After all, all the elements that needed to come together - improved seed varieties, correct cultural practices and fertilizer application recommendations, agricultural inputs, mechanization services

and even transportation of produce to markets - were within the management control of the government. Our USAID extension advisors and our Mission management team worked with Ghanaians on this for years.

We could never get the Ministry of Agriculture systems to perform in even a rough approximation of the way they should have. If the research institute provided the foundation seed, then the multiplication process would break down - especially since this had to be done on state farms on a mechanized basis. State-owned tractors were always in need of unavailable spare parts and operating funds. If somehow the seed actually got multiplied, then it either wouldn't get transported or would be poorly stored and therefore go bad or would get distributed to the farmers too late in the planting season and simply get eaten.

If by some miracle the seed got out to the farmers, then the fertilizer would certainly fail to be there. The government bought the fertilizer so the farmers would not be "victimized by wicked middle men." But even if the government budgeted adequately for the fertilizer, then the actual release of funds would be late. If and when the funds were released, then getting the necessary foreign exchange allocation from the Central Bank would prove a problem. Delays in ordering the fertilizer would cause it to arrive in the middle of the growing season rather than when needed. Since it would be raining and storage (or even clearance from the docks) was always problematic, fertilizer frequently spoiled and turned into something resembling concrete.

Meanwhile it would turn out that the extension staff didn't have the means of getting to the field. If they had vehicles, the vehicles would need spare parts. If the vehicles were functioning, then they couldn't get funds released to operate them. Should they get to the field, extension advice tended to be so standardized that the recommended fertilizer applications and cultural practices didn't take into account regional variations in soil types and agro-climatological conditions.

Murphy's law operates everywhere. But in the third world its effect is squared and in a third world government setting its effect is cubed.

Trying to make this thing work was great fun in that it gave me reason to get out of the office and to get to know our agriculture field staff and their counterparts. This provided me with some of the happiest moments and the most useful learning experiences - not to mention valued personal relationships - of my career. The one with whom I became most friendly was Quincy Benbow, an African-American from South Carolina. He, his wife, Annabelle, and their kids lived in Ho, the capital of the Volta Region. Two others were fellow Norwegian Americans from North Dakota and Minnesota: Jim Flaa and Wayne Slotten. From these guys I learned the difference between analytical and conceptual ability, on one hand, and practical wisdom, on the other. It was only later that it dawned on me that even though I almost always "won" my arguments with them, it turned out that their positions proved more often right than mine. This caused me to make a point in my later career of reminding others and myself over and over again that we need to be

careful not to win arguments that we should lose. Unfortunately, I sometimes forgot to follow this advice myself.

We had some limited success with the "focus and concentrate" program, but that was achieved because the American extension advisors and their counterparts would short-circuit the government systems to the point that they would haul seed and fertilizer to cooperating farmers in their pickups and that sort of thing. I don't think they ever seriously believed that "focus and concentrate" meant very much or would succeed. And they weren't trying to fool anybody. They simply cared about the farmers that they worked with and wanted to help them as much as possible. I'm not sure that I really drew the proper - now obvious - conclusions until after I saw somewhat the same thing happening in Nigeria - a country whose economy was much more functional and, compared to Ghana's, even prosperous.

Somehow the idea that the private sector, in that setting, should be allowed to handle the distribution and marketing of agricultural inputs, services and products seemed farfetched or extreme even when confronted with such massive evidence that the government could never manage it. I excuse myself and others to some extent because the visible private sector mainly consisted of large-scale international, mostly British, trading companies and small scale, mostly Greek and Lebanese, traders. Rightly or wrongly, both sectors were regarded with skepticism. The big trading companies didn't have a network that reached to the grass roots and the small-scale guys had a reputation for being "predatory". Of course, making the transition has turned out in fact to be far from simple. The private sector won't handle inputs on a completely commercial (as opposed to a contract) basis at reasonable cost until they have confidence in that government's intentions to abandon its involvement is firm. Demonizing the private sector was the cornerstone of the whole panoply of "London School of Economics" economic policies that most Anglophone countries followed after independence. And strange as it may seem now, one could not - even with the help of someone like Gus Ranis - have a genuine give and take discussion about it with civil servants or their bosses.

Q: Were you involved at all in introducing the cultivation of high-yielding rice varieties into Ghana?

GILBERT: I can remember there was a lot of discussion of this within the USAID Mission and among the Ghanaian agricultural establishment. This was just when some of the Green Revolution varieties were becoming available from the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. There was a big convocation at the Ambassador Hotel where all the folks from the whole agriculture establishment of the country were present, including professors from the university. And there was a heated discussion of the merits of long versus short grain rice. I think this was because the highest yielding varieties were short grain and not what the Ghanaians were used to. Frank Pinder, USAID Mission Director, got so exasperated that he took the floor and said that if they didn't stop being so fussy and just get on with growing some kind of rice that they were going wind up "eating their grandpappies" in a few years. (Laughs) He was the

only person who could have gotten away with saying such a thing. No one got mad. Instead, they took his point and tried harder to move forward.

Q: Was this a conference that he had organized?

GILBERT: I believe so. I'm having a hard time remembering the exact context. It might have been something we did in collaboration with the Ford Foundation.

I think we were trying to encourage them to use the new varieties to grow more rice. And one of the key constraints was rice milling. They had somehow acquired four state-owned rice mills either through supplier credits or through some kind of aid and trade deals with the Eastern Bloc. I think they might have come from East Germany. And they couldn't make the damn things work efficiently due to spare parts problems. Also, as I recall, they couldn't attract paddy from farmers at the price they could pay and still break even. This, in turn, had a lot to do with the Government's policy concerning rice imports as well as exchange rate and import duty policy. The alternative to using these rice mills was to use small scale, artisanal private mills. But rice milled by this method had to be parboiled first. This gave the rice a taste that was unacceptable to urban consumers. I'm sure urban consumers were used to imported rice – they got Uncle Ben's under PL 480 Title I. Anyway it was something that went on for several years and was never resolved. Do you remember anything about that?

Q: No. But there were issues about taste and consistency and so on. This complicated decisions concerning what kind of rice to grow and how to process it. But I don't remember the details. At any rate, any other dimensions from the Ghana experience? You can add them later if you like.

GILBERT: Well, it was my first post, and, like many before me, I fell in love with the Ghanaians.

Q: I was going to ask you how did you find the Ghanaian people to work with?

GILBERT: They were my first Africans... actually, my first Third World people. And again, sometimes you don't appreciate something really precious until later when you acquire more perspective. And it was only later that I fully appreciated the Ghanaians. One of their more interesting characteristics is their relative freedom from complexes about themselves in relation to the rest of the world — in particular, the white world. There are always exceptions to every generalization, but for the most part they seem to have a degree of self-confidence and self-esteem that permits them to accept outsiders, including white outsiders, on a friendly and straightforward basis. By straightforward I mean with very little, if any, suspicion, disdain or deference. I am, of course, talking about the educated people. From the uneducated - especially servants - one might get the same kind of wheedling, favor — and patronage — seeking behavior that can be very tiresome in other parts of Africa. But with those on a comparable socioeconomic level with us, it was possible to form friendships that were not about anything except our

enjoyment of one another's company. I never experienced that on a broad scale again in Africa except, very unexpectedly, in Sudan.

Q: How did you find working with them as regards getting things done?

GILBERT: Well, like all of God's "chillun", they talked better than they performed. On average, they were probably a little more afflicted with a disparity between what they say and what they do than Americans. But one would have to grant also that they were awfully damn articulate, and excellent debaters. Others and myself observed that something - whether education or culture or, more likely, a combination of the two - made them extremely good "in committee" as the Brits say.

Another thing I find interesting to look back on is the climate of intellectual freedom that prevailed even though coming out of a dictatorship and despite being under a military government during three of my four plus years there. I found that they were extremely frank. I also felt that most of their disagreements with us and among themselves were of a pretty high quality.

The main negative observation I had about Ghanaian society was the "zero-sum game" behavior I referred to earlier.

Q: And you saw that as pervasive in the upper caste society?

GILBERT: Especially in the government context. And it generated jealousy toward people who got ahead. I don't suppose it was worse there than in other countries, but my first encounter with it was in Ghana. I don't want to dwell on that. The main thing is that in Ghana in those days I met some of the most outstanding and attractive personalities I have ever known in my life. You and I both know many of those people. Mary Chinery-Hesse, Sam Oforu-Armah, Fred Sai and Alex Kwabong, to name a few. And then there were many others who were just extraordinarily good, hardworking people.

Q: Did you have much connection with the Embassy?

GILBERT: Yes.

Q: Who was the Ambassador at the time?

GILBERT: The first Ambassador was Franklin Williams. That was kind of a tough time because he and Frank Pinder couldn't abide one another. And that meant that people like Gordon Evans and I on the AID side and Jack Foley, the DCM, and Charles Adams, the Economic Section Chief, on the Embassy side did a lot more running back and forth than maybe we would have needed to do otherwise. And it wasn't much fun since, all too often, we became the bearers of unwelcome news.

Q: Why?

GILBERT: Because, I don't know...is it okay to get into personalities?

Q: For a little bit.

GILBERT: Well, Frank Williams was a...

Q: He was a political appointee.

GILBERT: He was a political appointee and, as Dick Cashin once said, you would have thought that he had a lot to be happy about in life. He had had a very distinguished career up until then. But you had the feeling that he was quite bitter - that something was gnawing at him. He seemed to be very paranoid; I suppose, you can't divorce all that from the context of the time... But this was before the assassination of Martin Luther King.

Maybe it was mostly that he and Frank Pinder really had a bitter relationship, but I don't think it was that simple.

Q: But they were both black Americans.

GILBERT: They were both black Americans. Whatever his background, Frank Williams gave the impression of being very elite — today, some might say he was "preppy." And I'm sure he had gone to all the right schools. He was an extremely bright and socially polished, though somewhat edgy, individual. And Frank Pinder was a savvy guy who liked to present himself as "down home." It was quite some time before Gordon Evans showed me in the "stud book" that he had received a Masters Degree from Cornell. He used to say things like, "That's all right for you fancy pants college boys, but I went to the Lucy Lydy Institute." That is very close to a direct quote. I don't know what the hell the "Lucy Lydy Institute" was but it was certainly meant to betoken to us some sort of third or fourth rate educational background. Frank Pinder had a warm personality and, at least compared to Frank Williams, was folksy. And he was a guy who was in touch with his roots. And I'm trying to remember if he always spoke grammatical English. I think he pretty much did, but still he was kind of a mainstream guy in his cultural context.

And the Ghanaians worshipped Frank Pinder. He had been there since ...

Q: I think it is good to talk about Frank Pinder, because he is one of the first in the world to work on international development in Africa.

GILBERT: Yes and, as I was saying, he had been in Ghana for a very long time. He had been the Food and Agricultural Officer, I think, when the program was very small during the Nkrumah period. He had had a close relationship with Nkrumah. I don't think Frank particularly agreed with much that Nkrumah did on the economic and agricultural fronts, but I believe that Nkrumah valued his opinion. I suppose that the Frank's advice was usually sought on fairly specific technical issues rather than on broader, more political and strategic issues. And so here was a new Ambassador who arrived in Accra and found

that his AID director — whose antecedents seemed inferior — had more standing and influence in many quarters of the Ghanaian establishment than he did. The Ghanaians eventually learned to check their tendency to look around when Frank Williams turned up some place and ask if Frank Pinder was also coming, but, by the time they did so, it was too late. And by then Frank Williams had gotten such a belly full, that he didn't want Pinder to get out of his box at all.

I was raised in the South and whenever I saw a house with a lot of cars out in front my reaction was that somebody had just died. And, if you went by the Pinders' house on Saturday or Sunday, it always, but always, looked like someone had just died. And it would not be because he or anyone else had done anything extravagant, let alone die. It was simply that he was at home on the weekends and all kinds of people - often people from upcountry agricultural research stations, agricultural colleges, the extension service offices or the universities at Cape Coast or Kumasi - would come by, not only to pay their respects, but to actually get advice about some technical matter or a personal issue such as which college their kids should apply to if they could afford to send them to the U.S. or, notwithstanding everything I said earlier about the Ghanaian elite, to ask for favors. Frank Pinder was viewed as an influential person and someone who could broker solutions to sticky problems within the Ghanaian public service structure. I believe he had worked for years in Liberia before coming to Ghana. I also think he came from at least a middle class Southern black background. For whatever reasons, he relished this sort of thing and handled it very well. And, from the Ghanaian perspective, I think he took on the aura of a traditional chief. In African traditional life many fairly mundane-seeming problems are brought to the traditional chief and elders for advice or decision. Frank took this role very seriously. Which reminds me, my experience was that the Americans who were most successful at developing rapport with the local people were southerners - whether black or white. I think Frank Pinder was from the south, but I also remember hearing that he had roots were in the Caribbean. That would mean that he got that touch from two sources. But even so, he was in a league of his own. Most of us who come from north of the Mason-Dixon line, tend to put simply "being there" for their fellow man pretty far down on their priority list. But in the South - especially in rural areas - investing in social and community relationships even at the cost of one's personal plans of the moment or even the day has retained a higher priority even during recent times than in, say, the rural North (where it definitely has a higher priority than in the urban North). This enables Southerners to be more genuinely graceful or even sincerely welcoming if people just drop in or if they bring uninvited guests to social functions.

Q: When you were dealing with the Embassy were there any issues on policy, on the relationship of the AID program to foreign policy interests and so on that posed problems? Were there efforts to get you to do or not do certain things? I'm thinking of broader political interests or the interaction of political foreign policy and development policy?

GILBERT: Nothing comes immediately to mind. You know, the personality factor was so strong that it may have overshadowed the real substance of some of these issues.

Q: I see.

GILBERT: Well, there was always friction because our regulations and procedures caused us to be unresponsive to Embassy “priorities du jour”. But as I recall, the unpleasantness seemed mostly about operational coordination. For example, one of my earliest memories after arriving in Ghana was that there was to be a Trade Fair. It was decided that AID would have an exhibit. I was the lucky duck charged with coordinating with the technical divisions on its content. I remember tangling with a member of the Ag staff who wanted to have our exhibit be a demonstration of artificial insemination. I had to tell him that the average city-dwelling Ghanaians probably would not react as we might wish to a guy with his arm buried up to the shoulder in the rear end of a cow. I was capable of formulating this thought myself, but I remember it now in the context of playing a mediating role between Embassy "big picture" and AID technical propensities. I think that it might be a pretty representative example. As I recall, the Embassy's "big picture" concerns were not as substantive as I came to expect later. It is also possible that I was too low on the totem pole to be privy to the really substantive issues and tensions.

Q: Were you involved in the self-help fund management?

GILBERT: Not particularly. I can't remember that there was much of a problem. Whereas self-help program management was later handed to the Embassies, during my days in Ghana it was firmly in AID hands. Bob Rose had primary responsibility as I recall. He was the mission's chief engineer. During most of my time we held weekly implementation committee meetings. Once we were done with the part of the meeting that had to do with the Commodity Import Program (CIP or Program Loan), Bob Rose would walk us through whatever questions had to be decided concerning self-help project proposals. I was always struck by the fact that each agenda item received very close to the same amount of attention even though the Program Loan allocations typically concerned hundreds of thousands of dollars while the Self-Help Project proposals seldom concerned more than one thousand.

And I can remember that one of the recurrent features of the Self-Help Project was that we financed construction of municipal public latrines. One of these was in Wenchi where Landon Holman was one of our Agricultural Education Advisors. He lobbied for it long and hard. At one point he argued that it was necessary so that the sight of so many people urinating in public wouldn't coarsen Mrs. Holman's sensibilities. This proposal became known in USAID Accra as the “Landon Holman Place of Public Convenience.” Thereafter, the idea of municipal latrines sort of caught on. There was a young Catholic missionary brother up country who got involved. His name was something like Brother Adrian. And I remember being treated in one of these meetings to a letter from Brother Adrian concerning the justification for one of his proposed latrines. It was a report of his having loitered in a nearby lorry park for four or five hours in order to observe the operation of the single existing latrine. He submitted tables and graphs based on his observations of the number of people who went in and the approximate time each spent in

the latrine. This is how he was able to say with authority how many holes were needed in the new one. Brother Adrian had a good sense of humor, as does Bob Rose. And this was Brother Adrian's way of telling Bob he was asking too many questions. They became good friends.

Q: These were ten or twenty-five thousand-dollar projects.

GILBERT: As I recall, these were usually no more than two or three thousand-dollar projects. The average allocation of Special Self Help funds for each Mission was about \$25,000 annually in the early days. Since then, the allocations have increased.

Q: What do you think about that kind of a program? Was it worthwhile?

GILBERT: I'm not sure what I thought of it at that point. I guess I thought it was a nice public relations gesture, but a pain in the neck from a management perspective. I remember thinking how lucky we were to have a guy like Bob Rose with broad enough shoulders, enough humor and enough talent - coupled with good horse sense - to be able to handle the job without letting it drive out too much other useful work.

But later on someone hit on the ingenious idea of developing detailed ground-rules and criteria so that it could be largely administered by Embassies. I remember that it took some hapless fellow (think he was an AID guy seconded to State) a long time to develop these instructions and negotiate the agreement between State and AID. It didn't take me long to conclude that, for a couple of hundred thousand dollars per country, it was a very good way to keep peace between AID and State. Forgive me, this is an unworthy thought, but it seemed to me that an awful lot of tension between Ambassadors and AID Mission Directors boiled down to visibility issues. And the Self-Help Projects provided lots of opportunities for Ambassadors to cut ribbons and give speeches.

Q: One of the sources of friction between the Ambassador and Frank Pinder was over the self-help fund because the Ambassador wanted to use it for political kinds of things that Frank Pinder didn't approve of.

GILBERT: I guess I remember that, now that you mention it. Of course, clear-cut rules helped eventually to eliminate that kind of conflict. There may have been something about that in the guidelines even then. But another problem then was that Mission Directors were mainly accountable for compliance. I think the subsequent guidelines made Ambassadors mainly accountable. I think it may have been only at that point that it became known as the Ambassador's Special Self-Help Project.

Q: What about the commodity import program? Was that useful, effective?

GILBERT: The commodity import program was largely used to finance spare parts and intermediate goods in order to boost capacity utilization in the manufacturing sector. The PL-480 Title I Program was also used for that purpose. (Ghana was certainly the first

country where PL 480 Title I was used to import gray cloth so that the local textile mills could bleach and print it.) The main aim was to maintain levels of production and employment in the domestic manufacturing sector. It was largely effective from that standpoint. The manufacturing sector had been surveyed following the coup to identify the factories that should be scrapped or mothballed pending privatization. But this survey couldn't be very rigorous owing to time pressures. Therefore, it should have been no surprise when it eventually emerged that many of these firms being kept afloat by the CIP and PL 480 Title I programs were not competitive. The infant industry argument can justify protecting initially inefficient industries provided that they have the potential to achieve competitiveness. But that argument couldn't be sustained for many of the industries based on Domestic Resource Cost (DRC) analysis. The DRC method analyzes industries in terms of the economic (rather than nominal) costs of the resources they use. It takes into account the extent to which a currency is overvalued, which artificially lowers nominal imported capital and input costs. Output is valued at the world price of comparable imports. For many, if not most, of the firms in Ghana's modern manufacturing sector at that time, this revealed that they were producing negative or marginal value added. The World Bank and the IMF probably had the access to the data and the staff capability to conduct this kind of analysis after the initial planning phase (say, six months) of the post coup stabilization program. I don't know if they did or not. My first appreciation of the situation came from a study that William F. Steel conducted and eventually turned into his Ph.D. dissertation for MIT. That would have been after 1968.

Q: They were not competitive.

GILBERT: No, and they were not industries that merited a place in Ghana's long-term future. Reasonable people can differ on whether it was necessary to maintain production and employment during this period. We have to bear in mind that this period followed ten years of Nkrumah's experiment with African Socialism. During that period there was rapid expansion of the parastatal manufacturing, agriculture and mining sectors. The numerous employees of these enterprises benefitted from levels of consumption made possible by subsidies to their enterprises and by the increasingly overvalued exchange rate, which made imports artificially cheap in local currency terms. The donors and, therefore, the World Bank and IMF wanted to promote a political transition to a stable and moderately neutral, if not specifically pro-Western, democracy. This goal could be jeopardized if Ghanaians, especially the more educated and urban dwelling elements, were subjected to a harsh adjustment process.

I don't think the donors as a group fully appreciated the economic cost of maintaining modern sector domestic production and employment. To the extent the economic issues became better understood, say during late 1967 and 1968, the political dimension was becoming more salient because there had been an attempted coup, and elections for the return to civilian rule loomed closer and closer. I think the need for fundamental economic liberalization and restructuring became quite well understood beginning sometime in mid-to-late 1968, but by 1969 the donors were dealing with a democratically

elected civilian regime that was not able to understand, and distinctly unwilling to deal with, the issue. They stonewalled until Christmas 1971 when they launched draconian measures that took virtually no account of the political dimension and led to a military coup. Of course, by that time the economic imbalances had become much larger, and therefore needed much more painful measures, than would have been the case had they acted one or two years earlier.

Q: Any other observations about the Ghana time?

GILBERT: I just thought of something else that we were doing? Well, we had an activity with the Volta River Authority (VRA) that involved their use of U.S. counterpart local currency for implementation of a program supported technically by a man named Phil Pierce. His work took place during a period when the Volta Lake had only recently filled to a much higher level following completion of the Volta Dam at Akosambo. He was a fisheries biologist and was helping the VRA with the technical problems and opportunities pertaining to the mainly artisanal fishing industry on the Lake. One of the main issues he helped with was a bit peripheral to his original mission; it involved control of the snail that was vector of schistosomiasis (or bilharzia) on the lakeshore. This became an important issue because the Lake's expansion brought both itself and the disease to a large number of people not used to either. The VRA also had responsibility for the welfare of the in-place populations newly on the margins of the lake and for those displaced as the Lake filled. As I recall, this meant that the VRA was responsible for schools and health services as well as agricultural and fisheries extension services for well over a million people. It probably doesn't redound greatly to the discredit of the VRA that the resettlement program for the displaced was widely considered to be a mess. I've never heard of a successful program of that type. The VRA had a great deal of technical assistance in the planning and execution of the resettlement program so the approach that largely failed had solid international credentials.

The schisto problem was just one element of a large-scale demonstration of the law of unintended consequences. Another example was that there was a terrific explosion of the fish population. At the same time the mix of fish species was changing. And you would think then, that this would be a great boon, but it wasn't. It was extremely hard for the fisher-folk to adapt to the new picture since it made their techniques obsolete. I can't remember the "ins and outs" of it, but it was a great lesson. It prepared me to understand the utility of social soundness and environmental impact assessments.

Q: Right. Good point.

GILBERT: That is about all that comes to mind concerning the Ghana days.

Q: You can add something later if you like. After Ghana, what?

Transferred to USAID Nigeria - 1971-1973

GILBERT: After Ghana I went to Nigeria.

Q: And what year was this?

GILBERT: And I went there as Evaluation Officer in February of 1971.

Q: What was the situation in Nigeria when you got there in 1971?

GILBERT: Mike Adler was still Mission Director. John Hummon was the Deputy Director. I was one of several people who reported to the Assistant Director for Program (AD/P). I believe that position had recently been vacated by Gordon Evans. Besides my new position, the AD/P supervised a capital development staff, an economics staff, a training staff and the Program Office per se, which was the core and largest unit. The Program Office was headed by a Chief. As I recall, Bob Huesmann was Chief of the Program Office and Acting Assistant Director for Program. (It's possible that Bob had been confirmed in the AD/P role). Dennis Barrett, as the most senior Assistant Program Officer, was at least the Acting Chief of the Program Office and may have been confirmed in that role. When Bob Huesmann left shortly after I got there, Bob Berg, head of a capital development staff, served for a time as Acting Assistant Director for Program. Eventually Walter Furst came out as Assistant Director for Program and everyone reverted to their normal places. I was there as Program Evaluation Officer and all these Program Office ructions affected me very little, except that they generated uncertainties and tensions.

But Mike Adler was transferred back to Washington or to another overseas assignment; I can't remember which. And John Hummon was Acting Mission Director for quite a long time. (I'm sorry for dredging all this up – it must be like listening to the “begats” in the Bible. Unfortunately, it's the way my retrieval system works.) This was an extremely difficult period in the relationship between the U.S. and Nigerian governments.

Q: Why was that?

GILBERT: It was because the U.S. government had adopted a neutral posture during the civil war. To the Nigerians, that amounted to supporting Biafra. And they felt, in effect, that the U.S. government owed them something like reparations. They never went so far as to say that explicitly, but they made it plain that by their behavior that they thought we owed them something.

Meanwhile, the U.S. government's collective mind was oppressed by the knowledge that the Nigerians' substantial oil revenues were being largely squandered. Their oil revenues made the Nigerians impervious to donor influence. That being so, it was hard to justify continuing to spend heavily on a wide range of quite good institutional development projects around the country. So, USAID needed to phase down this technical assistance program. Meanwhile, the Nigerians felt we “owed them” an increased level of assistance. When they realized which way the wind was blowing, the Nigerians were resentful.

AID's intent to cull and compress may have a factor in the decision to add a Program Evaluation Officer to the Mission's staff roster. Be that as it may, I found myself pouring my energies into that process during my first year in Lagos. A schedule was set up calling for me to lead evaluations of most technical assistance projects. I spent a lot of time on Nigeria Airways that year. I also met a lot of new people – most of whom were less than pleased to see me coming.

Q: Doing these evaluations yourself?

GILBERT: Yes and no. I was the point person in USAID Nigeria, but the methodology called for the evaluation process to be participatory – not just for warm fuzziness' sake but because one couldn't hope to get it right without the cooperation of the technical division and the project technical advisory team who were mostly, but at this point in time, not exclusively contract people. I was also backed by an embryonic evaluation staff in Washington. I was among the first group of fulltime evaluation officers. We used an evaluation methodology that had been developed by a contractor called Practical Concepts International (PCI). Larry Posner and his colleague, Leon Rosenblum, I think, were the principals. I got to know Larry pretty well. He was extremely smart and a great trainer.

The methodology that Rosenblum and Posner developed was based on something called the "logical framework" It's probably inappropriate to couch it in these terms since it has literally become a household expression throughout AID and much of the wider international development community. The term "innovative" was used too freely and loosely even in those days. But this was truly innovative, a breakthrough. Now it seems obvious that a project can't be evaluated (or even properly implemented) unless there is agreement as to what problems and opportunities it is directed at, how it is to affect them and how one defines the desired outcome. Before then evaluations tended to focus mainly on whether the inputs were delivered. The new methodology asked the additional question of whether the "development hypothesis" was born out, i.e. did the inputs (resources plus actions taken by the implementers) produce the predicted outcome? And as I recall, Bill Kontos and Allison Herrick were the moving spirits behind this in Washington. And there was a conference in Addis Ababa for the new recruits – mostly younger program officers - who were tasked with dealing with the latest AID/W "fad". Well, about the only good thing I could see about it at the time was that I got to go to Addis to be indoctrinated. Most of us at that workshop arrived highly skeptical. By the end of it, we were impressed with the methodology, but still skeptical about the prospects for shoehorning the amount of evaluation activity the new guidelines called for into the programming cycle. Although Bill, Allison and the PCI guys all emphasized how little staff time would be required, it couldn't have been more clear to us "sherpas" that they were either mistaken or blowing smoke. So, when I arrived in Lagos to be one of five-to-ten fulltime Program Evaluation Officers around the AID world, the only preparation I had was this session in Addis. And I think I had a "handy-dandy" little packet of materials.

When I got to Nigeria I was pleased that the Mission actively wanted its technical assistance projects evaluated. I was very busy from the get-go. I remember being distressed that I didn't have time to hold up my end of the only dispute I ever had with an Executive Office about an unreasonable housing assignment. (I made it work by having triple-decker bunk beds made so our three boys could all fit in one bedroom.)

I remember going up to Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) at Samaru near Zaria and evaluating the Kansas State University (KSU)-implemented Faculty of Agriculture project and the University of Pittsburgh-implemented Institute of Administration project. Later on we also evaluated the ABU School of Veterinary Medicine (that was delayed because KSU insisted on having an outside consultant participate on the grounds that USAID had no resident veterinary expertise). We went on to evaluate most of the other important projects that had significant time to run (say, more than two years). It was kind of interesting because, given the need to create a logical framework, you had to work with someone who could tell you what the project was supposed to be about. And I'll tell you something: the project documentation typical of those days wasn't much help. It was mostly just "blah, blah, blah..." And it was my experience that the grumpy people you started with at the beginning wound up embracing the process to the point of ownership. In fact it often turned out that it was difficult to get them to stop fiddling with the "Log Frame". One had to be on the lookout against their sketching out a new project design rather than using it to depict the existing project concept. Try as one might, it was inevitable that creating a Log Frame involved adding rigor to the project concept, but this mostly resulted in "raising the bar" for the purpose of assessing project performance.

The project evaluations gauged project performance, and also provided foundations for project phaseout plans that would permit accomplishment of essential institutionalization and capitalize on the sunk investments. Nigerian and U.S. contracting institutions were usually a bit disappointed but mostly accepted the outcomes as products of a collaborative exercise carried out in good faith. And so that was mildly satisfying. However, there were a few cases where decisions not based on our evaluations were taken by the Mission leadership. These were always more draconian than we recommended. We would then have to go back to the drawing boards to figure out how the decision could be respected with as little as possible prejudice to the future viability of the host institution.

So I did that for about a year. During that time Bill Ford replaced Mike Adler. This was a big shock because most of us thought highly of John Hummon and expected that he would be confirmed as Mission Director. Bill was new to AID, having come from directing a large voluntary sector program in Detroit.

However, Bill Ford arrived and life went on. Things were more or less okay for a while. John really seemed to throw himself into working closely with Bill and supporting him. To all outward appearances theirs was a good relationship.

But then we learned one day that Steve Christmas would be coming out to replace John as Deputy Director. This was in either late 1971 or 1972. Martin Luther King had been

assassinated a few years before and race relations in the U.S. had been inflamed ever since. For one reason or another, a large number of blacks had been assigned to USAID Nigeria. I don't think it was coincidental that both Bill Ford and Steve Christmas were blacks. Most of these individuals were competent and, for lack of a better expression, reasonable in their publicly expressed views and moderate in behavior. But a minority of Blacks within the Mission were angry, not very discriminating in directing their anger and prone to acting out. And I would say that the mission became fairly polarized. I'm sure this was a challenge for the front office. Their efforts to deal with the situation were not visible to the likes of me. The situation remained tense during my whole time in Lagos, but the lid pretty much stayed on.

I've always felt that it was unconscionable that the personnel system condones, facilitates or promotes – I don't know which – the placement of disproportionate numbers of Black staff members in units headed by Black managers. It may happen with other minorities, but there haven't been many non-Black minority managers in the Africa Bureau. Nor have there been many non-Black minority staff.

But even if the lid stayed on in some sense, the last part of my time in Lagos was one of the worst work experiences of my life. There were many dimensions to this. Walter Furst, the Assistant Director for Program, disliked Nigeria and didn't get along at all well with Bill Ford and Steve Christmas. He thought them a bit naïve as well as inexperienced. They in turn disliked his intellectual aggressiveness and outspokenness. He bluntly challenged any proposition that didn't stand up to his analysis. It had to be very tiresome, but they were wrong in viewing it as insubordination (and I believe that, after a time, Bill Ford came to appreciate that and hold Walter in genuine affection). Walter was a product of an earlier AID culture in which the Program Officer, as the development philosopher in residence, coordinated the thought processes of the Mission. In that culture Program Officers who weren't confident to the point of aggressiveness often got “chewed up” by their Mission Directors. Meanwhile, Bob Berg - the Capital Development Officer who had acted in that position before Walter arrived – seemed to compete with Walter and, whether intentionally or not, to undercut him occasionally in senior staff meetings. That didn't do anything to improve Walter's user-friendliness. Norman Mosher was the head of an economics unit that also contained Patrick Gormely.

So things were tense enough when the departure of Dennis Barrett left the Program Office Chief (head of the core staff of the Program Office) position open. I was assigned to act in that position. I think Walter left before I was confirmed in that position. That made me responsible for supervising five or six professionals, including a training officer who had been discussed as candidate for the Program Office Chief job and a couple of International Development Interns (IDIs). One of these was an extremely bright and capable young Black woman who was brand new to AID. It soon became obvious that the front office was toying with the idea of either making her the Program Office Chief or dividing things up in some way so that she would be responsible for program operations and I would be responsible for evaluation and program analysis.

This situation may have been the last straw for Walter, because he got himself transferred back to Washington. His replacement was a much younger guy named Ed Nadeau, who had been on the fast track in the Latin America Bureau. He died at least ten years ago at around age 50. He was technically extremely good, a born leader and little inclined to the nitty gritty of management. Like Walter before him, he resisted the idea of making the young woman Chief of the Program Office. The atmosphere became charged with tension. Whether or not they did so to prove their case, the front office saw to it that the young woman was given some challenging and high visibility special work assignments. After a few weeks she suffered a nervous breakdown and had to be evacuated.

I've often pondered why this happened. I don't think it was because of the tasks she was given. She acquitted herself quite well. I think other sources of stress were more to blame. Though somewhat troubled by mood swings, she got along well with most of her Program Office colleagues - including, I think, me. She also had little experience with, or stomach for, the more operational aspects of program office work. This meant she would have derived little satisfaction from the performance of her core responsibilities. I know she also felt conflicts about being the front office candidate in opposition to several candidates, including me, whose qualifications were – at least, by conventional standards – were objectively superior to hers. Yet, given the atmosphere in the Mission, she probably didn't feel she could decline. Had she done so, she would have been made to feel that she was “letting the side down”. She was the main casualty and the main victim. It took a lesser toll on my bosses and me. In that atmosphere, I didn't have the nerve to actively lobby for the job. I believe that my bosses, Walter and Ed, favored a technically based selection. We didn't talk about it much, but I feel safe in saying that it cost the three of us a lot of sleep.

Shortly after the poor woman's nervous breakdown, I was confirmed in the Program Office Chief position. And for the remainder of my time in Nigeria I managed the Program Office.

Q: Were we just closing down projects or were new initiatives taken?

GILBERT: I can't remember any initiative except the “Block Grant” that AID/Washington decided should become the centerpiece of the Program once the conventional program phased down. As I recall, discussions of the Block Grant with the Nigerian Government started before Steve arrived. He came out on TDY to discuss the concept with the Mission and the Government before he arrived as Deputy. However, I don't believe active negotiations started until about eighteen months after I arrived in Lagos. They were handled almost exclusively by the front office and seemed to proceed in a parallel universe with little Program Office involvement (although Ed Nadeau probably knew more about this than I needed to know).

After I took charge of the Program Office roughly at the beginning of my second year in Lagos and based largely on the work I had led during that first year, we had negotiated new project agreements with the government and the beneficiary institutions. And we

were implementing those agreements. Though they had approved these packages, the Africa Bureau couldn't allocate the budgeted funds on a timely basis. I sometimes had the feeling that they were trying to force us to wrap these projects up faster than the revised agreements called for, but this was never made explicit. I think this might have occurred during the period when the federal budget process got so dysfunctional that the fiscal year had to be shifted so that it started October 1 rather than July 1.

This Program Office staff consisted of Jim Anderson, Terry Liercke, Tom Tyler (who left the Agency shortly afterwards), Doug Broom and me. Each of the other four was responsible for a sector of the Nigeria program. The slow release of our approved budget in "drips and drabs" forced us to develop a method of gauging right down to a gnat's eyelash what the operational funding requirements of these projects were. This enabled us to allocate the scarce available funds to those projects according to operational need. And, though forward funding for some projects fell to about six weeks before we were able to add funds, we managed to keep these programs going as agreed based on the revised project plans. But it was quite labor-intensive and a bit nerve-wracking because funding of some contracts occasionally risked falling beneath the amount needed for demobilization, if it had come to that. Keeping this crazy process on track made us a bit "demanding" in our relations with the Controller's Office, the technical divisions, the institutional contractors and even the front office of the Mission (whose approvals and signatures we frequently needed). Obviously the contractors felt that they were being poorly treated. Suffice it to say that our efforts weren't universally appreciated.

Nigeria is a fascinating country. I hate the way the word "dynamic" is bandied around, but that word really applies to Nigeria. More than any African country I know, it is a cauldron, and history is conjuring with it. I think, like India and Brazil, it will have ups and downs – perhaps more dramatic ones than either of those two countries – but will begin to cohere in the next decade or two into a strong economic and political force in Africa and, eventually, beyond.

I really think that AID did a lot of good there. We laid important foundations for future development through our investments in institution building. These investments were made in the form of technical assistance and training under contracts with Michigan State University for the University of Nigeria in agriculture, with Wisconsin for the University of Ife in agriculture, New York University for Lagos University in public administration, Kansas State University for Ahmadu Bello University in agriculture and veterinary medicine, and with Ohio State and Wisconsin in the education sector in the north. That's only a partial list. There were other contracts in the education, agriculture extension and agricultural research sectors that I can't recall specifically.

As a result of these long-running projects thousands of people received training and hundreds were groomed through academic and on-the-job mentoring for leading roles in the targeted institutions, each with a key role in the development process.

And — I would love to research this — I believe that, if we looked at the development of the other Nigerian universities that occurred during the seventies and eighties (as the number of States in Nigeria grew from four to around twenty and, later, to forty odd), we would find that a lot of the Nigerian leaders in that process were people who gained training and experience under the earlier generation of AID institutional development projects that were focused on the smaller number of pioneering institutions.

The Nigerians can really be very difficult people to work with because they are strong minded, energetic, tough and tenacious — whether they are in the right or the wrong. But you know, I think we at times sold them short. For instance - we talked about the bitterness between the Nigerian and American governments after the civil war - one of the things that generated this bitterness was the position taken by the U.S. and the international community concerning the management of the relief and rehabilitation program for former Biafra. The donors wanted to manage that program directly because they were convinced that there would be a blood bath. But the Nigerians categorically refused. Their position was, “These are our people, and we will care for them ourselves”.

Finally, the US and the other donors backed down. And it turned out there were decent and dedicated Nigerians to take on that task. A guy named Olusegun Obasanjo, then a Brigadier General who commanded the Nigerian Army engineers, was given the job of running the R and R Program as we called it. He ran it very well. I never heard a word of criticism of his performance in that role. There was certainly no blood bath. It drives me nuts that positive news seldom gets out through the media. Our diplomatic reporting and internal discourse are regrettably not free of a tendency to depict whole populations as caricatures of the extreme types among them. And those perceptions sometimes influence our policy and decision-making.

Q: Did you deal with Brigadier Obasanjo?

GILBERT: Yes, but not substantively. I met him about twice. I can't say that we ever got to know one another. He frequently visited USAID Mission offices in the Mother Cat building (the name given it by the Yoruba landlord), but dealt mainly with the R and R staff and the front office.

Q: But then we had a rehabilitation program going on at that time?

GILBERT: I believe it continued for most of my time in Nigeria. The office that ran the R and R program, comprising around ten professionals was, I believe, the largest substantive staff unit in what was surely the biggest USAID mission in Africa at that time. As I recall it, they were engaged in running a program of grants to various NGOs, including a food aid program. I think it also involved operating something like a Commodity Import Program. There was a supply management group that was mostly engaged in supporting the R and R program. But the Nigerian Army was certainly responsible for the overall administrative framework and much of the hands-on effort.

Q: Any idea what the scale of our rehabilitation program was, how much money are we talking about?

GILBERT: No exact idea, but it was significant. I think our pre-replanning technical assistance budget was 19 million dollars, which still seemed pretty substantial in those days in the Africa context. I think the total R and R program, including food aid, was more than that.

A propos the fear of a blood bath, I remember being struck by the fact that almost all of my contacts in the Nigerian government were Ibos who had been in Biafra during the war. And the other thing I remember is that they weren't particularly thankful to be reemployed. They seemed to take it for granted. And one of them expressed to me a grievance that he said was shared by his confreres. It was that they hadn't been promoted with their age group peers while they were serving the Biafran cause. And so, in terms of grade and salary, they were a few years behind their colleagues who had entered the federal civil service when they did. I personally had a hard time sympathizing with them on that issue. It certainly wasn't a blood bath.

Q: They came back?

GILBERT: Yes. And half of the drivers in the USAID motor pool were Ibos who had come back. As far as I can tell, they and other Ibos who returned to higher positions in the administrative and general services area were all reabsorbed in many of their prewar functions very quickly. As I recall the dispatcher and assistant dispatcher were Ibos. I never noticed any particular tension between the Ibo and non-Ibo drivers.

On the other hand, I couldn't observe the real relations between them. My impression is that West Africans are very preoccupied with peaceful relations between individuals and groups. On the whole, they are considerably more polite than we Americans and Westerners as a group. The politeness serves an important social purpose. Few West Africans live in areas that are not multiethnic in some important degree. And even within their own ethnic groupings, there are all manner of subgroup, including caste, distinctions. I'm convinced their regrettable inability or unwillingness to hold one another accountable is probably related to the extreme care they normally take not to crowd one another. The question "why?" when it is asked of an individual concerning his or her acts, seldom elicits a useful response. When asked by an African it is generally a rhetorical expression of frustration, and no response is expected.

One of the most fascinating people I met in Nigeria was a man named Clement Onyamalukwe who was married to an American girl and, knowing him, probably still is. During the war he was in charge of civil aviation in Biafra, particularly the airport that was so central to the relief effort. And, as I recall, he held an important federal post in civil aviation after the war. But he was the guy who managed to keep that airport open so all those planes could get in and out.

Q: The relief?

GILBERT: Yes. I forget the name of the airport.

Q: Uli Airstrip.

GILBERT: Yes, something like that. And there were a lot of pretty wild stories about how they did things on the Biafran side during the Civil War. And I would think that quite a few books would have been written about that. But I haven't noticed any. The Biafrans were doing technologically ingenious things such as running vehicles on coal and steam, let's say. I've only heard sketchy references to the things they did. Come to think of it, I believe Clement Onyamalukwe told me that he or others would be writing a book.

I enjoyed being in the country even though in some ways it was one of my least happy office working situations.

Q: In our program, we were phasing out projects?

GILBERT: A lot of the projects were phased out. I don't remember if any actually had closed down before I left during the summer of 1973.

Q: Did we go back the eastern region and the University of Nigeria project and things of that sort?

GILBERT: No. I don't think the University of Nigeria resumed functioning during my time there. This is something that I would want to be cautious about, but I think it was because, to the Nigerians, that University symbolized the seeds of the civil war. They saw it as a hotbed of Ibo nationalism and chauvinism and, worse in their eyes, as the devils workshop in which remarkable technical capacities had been added to the Ibos enterprising, can-do attitude. I'm pretty sure that people, like Carl Eicher, who were instrumental in the development of the University through the AID program, could not get visas to visit Nigeria for a long time after the civil war. They were on a black list. They were somehow all tarred with the Biafra brush.

I visited "soon-to-be" Biafra during a TDY during March and April of 1966. Later, apart from my official travel, our family traveled around much of Nigeria by road. We visited the Western Region, the Midwest, the Middle Belt and the main cities of Northern Nigeria, but I never got back to the Eastern Region. I had no official reason to go there because the R and R program was all we had there, and it was exempt from the concerns that caused us to replan the technical assistance program.

Q: Well, anything else on that? You can add it later but I think you have given a good picture of the situation there. Anything more about these institutional development projects in terms of their impact or their function?

GILBERT: Well, you know, when I evaluated our institutional development projects, we didn't go into the question of impact in terms of, say, the numbers trained by the beneficiary institutions or the subsequent contributions of those who had received the training. We didn't have the time for that, nor was AID/W open to rethinking the retrenchment that they had already decided upon. And we didn't have the time or resources to assess the quality of the training they provided. We mainly assessed (a) the degree to which institutional goals were being met and (b) the types and amounts of additional assistance that would be needed for the achievement of the most essential goals (particularly institutional viability) to be either attained or within reach when U.S. project assistance ended.

Q: On the whole, were the institutions pretty well established and staffed by Nigerians at that time?

GILBERT: I would say so. Our advisory teams were chiefly covering leadership positions while the Nigerians slated to fill these roles permanently were either still in training in the U.S. In a few cases the top Nigerians had returned and were receiving on the job mentoring from senior Americans. We considered that phase out should not occur until the leadership positions within faculties and departments were filled by people who had completed their academic training and had functioned in those jobs for one or two years while being coached in their new roles by the often-quite-distinguished advisors who led these AID-financed university contract teams. Our first idea was that there should also be a plausible alternative Nigerian candidate for each senior Nigerian position, but I think this target had to be sacrificed later for budgetary and timing reasons.

Since we have been discussing some of the evaluation work we did while I was there, I want to complete that discussion before we go on to other matters. The Amadu Bello University Faculty of Veterinary Medicine evaluation didn't turn out to be as valuable as I would have wished. Veterinary education posed issues that were quite distinct from those surrounding the agriculture faculties at ABU and the University of Ife. Also, the USAID Food and Agriculture Division had no veterinary medicine education expert on its staff. So we agreed when KSU requested that a Professor of Veterinary Medicine participate in that evaluation. The KSU Chief of Party and the USAID division chief nominated the individual we selected. I'll not mention the Professor's name, but as soon as he hit the ground it was clear that he was an old friend and colleague of the Chief of Party and that he had no intention whatsoever of operating according to the new USAID evaluation precepts or of being collaborative. My experience with this guy was an eye-opener. It was my first and most dramatic encounter with what I came to call a "fraternal evaluation". The draft report made no pretense of objectivity. It was essentially a polemic on why we should go along with everything KSU wanted to do plus some expensive and time-consuming things that they hadn't even thought of. We obviously didn't implement the recommendations. It was the operational equivalent of kicking over the card table and shooting out the lights. By this time the demand for systematic evaluations was abating, and I couldn't prevent the resulting report from being a muddle. We wound up planning

project assistance to the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine much less rationally than in the preceding cases. As I recall, we “split the difference” between what KSU wanted, as reflected in the fraternal evaluation, and what others and I thought made sense based on the kind of analysis that we normally used. It was a lesson for me.

Q: Well, maybe that covers it for Nigeria for the moment.

GILBERT: Yes.

Q: And then you can add later. You left Nigeria in 19...?

Granted a six months sabbatical to complete doctoral thesis - 1973

GILBERT: 1973, in the summer. And I went back to Ghana for two weeks thinking I would pick up documents and information pertaining to my Ph.D. thesis topic. I can't remember exactly what I planned to pursue at that point, but I quickly discovered that a number of people who had been in Accra during my time had chosen topics that overlapped with mine. I didn't have time to reformulate my plan, so I wound up just getting every set of semi-relevant-seeming statistics and documentation that I could acquire or photo copy before heading back to the U.S.

I had been awarded a six-month assignment to a brand new training program that permitted one to pursue independent studies, research and/or writing on subjects approved by AID. I requested and was allowed to go to the Fletcher School. I arrived there in early September and got my reformulated thesis proposal approved just before Thanksgiving. I really worked flat out and turned my back on all the distractions and temptations (being lionized or patronized as the representative of the field practitioners to groves of academe was something that absorbed much of the time and attention of many mid-career trainees. There is a considerable appetite among academics for practitioners' input to their classes and to have their research and ideas vindicated by them.). But it was clear that six months wouldn't be sufficient, so I applied for and was granted 90 days' leave of absence. With that amount of time I was able to “break the back” of my thesis. After returning to work, I worked on it one day per weekend and then took all of August 1975 off to work on it in the State Department library. I was able to submit a complete draft by early spring of 1976. About when I began 14 weeks of one-on-one French training in early summer of 1976, I received the draft text back with the comments of my readers (Rob West and Dirk Strycker). So I took French for six hours a day and worked evenings on revising my thesis with the invaluable assistance of my typist and editor, Susan Mudge (one of the most efficient, organized, conscientious and kind people I ever met). I also sold one investment property and bought two others during this period. By the time I left for Yaounde, I had reached the 2 plus level in French, successfully defended my thesis and acquired borderline high blood pressure.

Even though I asked for and was granted the 90-day leave of absence, AID didn't stop my salary. I was so busy I didn't have time to call around trying to get people to remedy this

oversight. I was really in a crisis mode trying to make the most of the available time. Later on it took me a couple of years to get anybody to deal with the fact that I had been paid while on leave without pay. Apart from trying to be the guy my mother thought I was, I knew that sooner or later it would come to light and, when that happened, I would be treated like a crook.

Q: You had to pay it all back?

GILBERT: Well I finally “got” to pay it back. And when “they” finally focused on the situation, they at first wanted me to make a lumpsum payment of a fourth of a year's salary. I could have afforded that when I was newly returned to the U.S. in the fall of 1973, but after three years in the U.S. I would have had to refinance a house to come up with that kind of money. And there was no way to do that from Cameroon, where I was by then. They finally agreed, somewhat huffily, to deduct it from my salary over a period of several years.

While we're on the subject of the personnel administration “system”, I'll tell you something that happened during the period when I was in Ghana. During the 60s and 70s lots of people were assigned to Vietnam. Families couldn't accompany employees there and had to reside instead in the U.S. or at overseas “safe haven” posts (Bangkok and Manila are the two that I recall). Because of the allowances, Vietnam duty offered significant financial rewards. Therefore, Vietnam assignments were a boon for single employees or those who could easily tolerate or even wanted a separation from their spouses. There were enough volunteers for a while, but the fighting escalated, U.S. involvement deepened and the U.S. “hearts and minds” programs began to mushroom after 1965. Increasingly people were assigned on a nonvoluntary or “directed” basis.

I had been in Accra for only about a year, when I received word that I was assigned to Vietnam. I was upset. I had a young family, and I didn't want a vacation from them. I was distinctly wary of the potential effects of the inevitable strains on family relations that would result from the prolonged separations that such an assignment would entail. Also, though I wasn't at all a “dove”, I felt after 1965 that we were embarked on ill-advised and hopeless enterprise in Vietnam. I intended to leave AID rather than go to Vietnam, and said as much. Charlie Lindbeck was in charge of such things in the Africa Bureau at that time, and he managed to get me “deferred.” He told Central Personnel that I would exercise my civil service reemployment rights rather than go to Vietnam. Fortunately, Central Personnel apparently didn't notice that I had no civil service reemployment rights. (Laughs) I didn't have them because I had converted to Foreign Service (Reserve) status less than 36 months after entering on duty. I shouldn't be scornful of Central Personnel because they are usually quite good at making sure that the rules get followed in such cases. They may have been a party to Charlie's gambit. Whichever it was, I am very grateful to never have served in Vietnam. But “I digress...”

**Two assignments to the Sahel Development Program office in USAID Washington -
1974-1976 and 1981-1983**

GILBERT: So then, after that year at Fletcher, I came back to the Africa Bureau and I went to work for David Shear in the office responsible for the nascent Sahel program. I think it was called Central and West Africa Regional or AFR/CWR. During the first several months, Sam Ray and I pulled together a budget submission for all elements of that program. This was during the summer and fall of 1974. By that time assessment teams fielded by MIT, Purdue and others (including a group led by Ed Fei, later the PPC Regional Coordinator for Africa) had gone out to the Sahel and prepared reports that contained drought recovery as well as medium and long-term development program recommendations. As a result, we were flooded with project ideas that needed to be sorted through and, if preliminarily accepted, further documented for full review, approval and implementation. And most of these “interventions” (I first heard that expression during this time) were being lobbied for by various technical or institutional interest groups. Given that at least three different studies had been prepared, proposed interventions often existed in several configurations or formed parts of different larger projects or program frameworks. This was prior to the improvements to the project development and approval procedures that came to be reflected in Handbook 3. The procedures in place at that time were not so clearly specified, and, worse, there was little discipline in their application.

So, as a first step, Sam and I simply catalogued all these ideas in an approximation of the annual budget submission format of that period – I think its acronym was “CAP”.

Q: This was the precursor to the Sahel Development Program (SDP)?

GILBERT: Yes, in a pretty preliminary way. Some of the activities were for straight relief and others were for short-term rehabilitation. Another important group was called something like "medium-term program ideas" that had come out of some of the various studies. There were also a number of regional projects that predated the Sahel drought. We briefly considered triaging them, but abandoned the idea because there were so many items and we were both newcomers. If we had undertaken that, the resulting controversy would have prevented us from organizing and categorizing the various options, and that was the essential first step. And I think it took us at least until Christmas time to complete that task. And when the thing was complete it was about as thick as a phone book, although on heavier paper. As I recall, that product fed into a delayed, ad hoc annual budget review process. That, in turn, fed into the Congressional Presentation process and so forth. And by these steps, what became the Sahel Regional Program began to emerge in semi-conventional AID documentation.

Before that process ended – probably in the early fall of 1974, I was appointed Officer-in-Charge (OIC) for the Entente States. The Entente comprises Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin (then Dahomey), Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) and Niger. My three colleagues and I handled three broad categories of programs. For the Sahel countries there were relief and rehabilitation cum PL 480 emergency food aid interventions to deal with the impact of the drought and its aftermath. The second category was the nascent Sahel development

program. It mainly consisted then of two or three medium-term project ideas that were in preparation for each Sahelian country plus a larger number of proposals for support to regional institutions or networks. The third category consisted of the preexisting regional program for the West and Central Africa Region augmented by new Entente regional projects under the sponsorship and coordination of the Council of the Entente.

The Entente was a regional structure for cooperation on various economic fronts among the member countries. Some of the cooperation was of an operational nature involving trade and customs arrangements. It also sponsored and operated regional development projects. These typically consisted of sub-projects with a common thematic focus on national needs. None that I can recall was focused on a transnational need that required a regional response. The Entente was also something of a patronage mechanism. The big patron was France; the intermediate patron was the Ivory Coast. For France and Ivory Coast it was an exercise in something like nation building, but on a regional scale. Ivory Coast President Houphouët-Boigny had a legitimate position as the doyen of the national leaders within the region. He was also, I believe, the most dependable partner of France within that grouping. Before independence he, like Leopold Senghor of Senegal, had served in several postwar French cabinets.

Active cooperation between France and the U.S. – a rare, if not precious, flower – was central to the nascent Sahel Program. And, in retrospect, working with the French – who had lots of skilled, knowledgeable and dedicated African-oriented experts – was one of the real pleasures of working on the Sahel Program, when things were working well. During that period things mostly worked quite well.

So, for the above - and perhaps other – reasons, the Entente was a mechanism that our elders and betters felt should be supported, and I didn't disagree. We operated a number of regional programs. One had to do with African enterprise development. Another focused on the livestock sector. Both had loan and grant components with the grants going to the poorer countries and the loans going to Ivory Coast, Togo and Dahomey. A small international, entirely non-African, Entente Council technical staff managed these activities. Paul Kaya, the executive secretary, was from Congo-Brazzaville. He insisted on keeping member country nationals off the staff. He knew that, otherwise, the inevitable pressures to balance such appointments would lead either to overstaffing or tensions over the composition of a small staff. The staff consisted of an American, Robert Mingus, and two Frenchmen.). I believe these regional projects were also funded by France and, just possibly, by other donors – such as Canada - as well. Largely due to legal definitions and accounting issues that arose from the multi-donor and regional character of these projects, the processes for designing, reviewing and approving them infallibly became marvels of complexity. Each project was designed in terms of thematics and criteria that would govern the selection of sub-projects in each country. Once the projects were approved, the Entente staff worked with national staffs to identify, analyze and document sub-projects that had to be approved by the U.S. and other donors as well as by the Council of the Entente. This process consumed an amazing amount of Africa Bureau staff time and energy. The pressure to resolve all issues in favor of moving forward was

greater than usual for these projects because the Entente regional program provided an avenue for providing assistance to Ivory Coast, which could not qualify for bilateral assistance due to its high per capita income, for responding to needs in Togo and Benin which had no significant bilateral programs due to their small size, and for cooperation with the French.

The medium-term projects that were coming on stream for Burkina Faso and Niger also absorbed an awful lot of energy due to the issues they raised and the lack of consensus, for a time at least, as to how they should be documented, approved and funded. So between the complexities of the Entente Regional and Sahel medium-term projects on one hand and the volume and urgency of the emergency and R and R needs on the other, the Entente Desk's staff of four was really unmercifully overworked.

Q: Let's pause a minute. So, you were working on the Sahel program for how long?

GILBERT: For two years: from the summer of 1974 to the summer of 1976.

Q: You were there at the creation, so to speak.

GILBERT: I sure was. And it was tumultuous.

Q: What were we trying to do? What was the point of all this activity?

GILBERT: I'll tell you one thing. Some of us had precious little time to stop and reflect on what the point of it was. And I'm sure my comment on that would resonate with some feelings of outside critics also. But, the answer to that question has several layers.

One, of course, was that there had been this tremendous drought and, as a result, a humanitarian emergency in the Sahel. Task number one was to address the immediate threats to lives and livelihoods arising from that catastrophe. And a lot of food aid and related emergency relief resources were flowing into the Sahel even after I arrived in the summer of 1974. This need and the related workload would remain the principal focus of our energies for the next year or two.

But there was also a shared view among the leadership of the Africa Bureau, and to some extent beyond it, that droughts were a recurring phenomenon in the Sahel and that the region's ability to cope with future occurrences could be greatly enhanced through pursuit of a bold and imaginative development strategy. The resulting investment program, though probably expensive, would likely prove less so than responding every ten or so years to recurring drought emergencies. Without such action, the Sahel's ability to cope with each successive drought would decline due population increase.

The countries of the West and Central African Sahel were all francophone and had previously received little assistance, apart from the substantial amounts provided by France. But these countries' needs were so great and their own capacities so weak that most French aid went to cover government operations. Although there was some variation

from country to country (Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso each had considerably more administrative, technical and financial capacity than Mauritania, Niger and Chad), the French typically remained closely involved – politically, operationally and financially - in the conduct of the essential business of these governments. The French presence in the private sector was even more pervasive. I remember observing a vivid example of this in Cote d'Ivoire. Sometime in the late sixties I was sitting between flights in the bar at the Abidjan airport when two overall-wearing Frenchmen carried in a barstool, which they installed in place of a defective one. I also remember seeing Frenchmen manning the meat section of a super market in Abidjan in 1969. (Once, in about 1976 in Gabon, I saw Yugoslavs doing manual labor on road construction; our embassy told me that it was impossible to hire Gabonese to do such work.)

AID provided very little assistance to the former French colonies in Africa. That little was provided in the form of regional projects, largely designed to strengthen regional institutions and further a regional approach to development. Though I was never involved in any deliberations on the subject, I believe AID's stance reflected a consensus that the countries of the region were not potentially viable and that they effectively remained colonies of France. The French were wary of our substantive involvement in these countries. It wasn't in our nature to take a hands-off approach. These countries were understood within AID and State to be French turf (the French expression is "chasse réservée" or hunting reserve) and not our problem.

Though I was still in Nigeria when the U.S. was coming to grips with the extent of the Sahel drought and its implications, I'm pretty sure that the initial reaction was to wonder what the French planned to do about it. No doubt, it was a rude shock when the media coverage and the resulting public reaction made it impossible to leave the needed response to the French and their European partners. I doubt that CNN was in operation in the early 1970s and the media certainly brought vivid images of human suffering to the attention of the American public during the Nigerian civil war, but the Sahel drought was definitely one stage in the development of what has come to be called the "CNN effect."

I give this background because it helps to put in perspective the significance of the change that the legislative mandating of substantial funding for a special Sahel regional development program represented when it was launched in the mid-1970s. The leaders who pushed it through were, as I recall, the Assistant Administrator for Africa, Dr. Samuel Adams, his Deputy, Don Brown, the Director of REDSO/WCA in Abidjan and then AFR/CWR in Washington, David Shear, and the Director of the Africa Bureau Technical Resources Office, Princeton Lyman. Earlier Dr. Adams and Don Brown had relied on the previous leadership of AFR/CWR - Director Fermino Spencer, Deputy Director Owen Cylke and Assistant Director for Program Hariadene Johnson - in pursuing these same goals. However, this group did not command the staff resources or exercise the degree of discretion in the application of project selection criteria and AID procedures that the Shear team enjoyed.

The concept that Congress accepted and wrote into AID's legislation had both programmatic and institutional aspects. The programmatic content was based on the assumption that the Sahel could achieve food security and the ability to withstand future recurrence of droughts if sufficient investment were made in the development of the rain-fed and irrigated agricultural and livestock production potentials of the region. With four river basins (Senegal, Gambia, Volta, and Niger) and the Lake Chad basin located in the Sahel it seemed more or less obvious that there was a large irrigation potential that, if developed, could give the region an agricultural surplus in normal years and, thus, the resilience to withstand the droughts that would recur cyclically. This was to be a regional program consisting of national/bilateral and transnational components. Together they would form a coherent regional effort to address the highest priority development needs of the Sahel.

The main need was for enhanced food security and, with it, the capacity to withstand the effects of future droughts. This concept was formulated without much attention to economic – particularly, marketing - issues. I don't recall that there was any discussion of how rain-fed subsistence farmers, once rendered destitute by the next drought, would benefit from the irrigated sector's greater ability to maintain production. It was understood that population growth, which caused cultivation to extend inexorably onto increasingly marginal lands in competition with livestock grazing, would have to be slowed somehow. But primary health care coverage was so abysmal that it was obvious that improving it was to be the first order of business.

The Sahel governments seemed never to officially think or talk about markets except to decry the rise of agricultural prices above some "fair level" due to the evil machinations of middlemen. Their idea of fair was based on some rough calculation of the cost of production and took little account of the farmers needs or of the middleman's costs for transport, storage or of the need for middlemen to make a profit as an incentive to stay in a risky business. If one questioned this stance, the reaction of the Sahelian side would range somewhere between stony, studied non-comprehension to incredulity and huffiness. In those days – after AID had effectively purged its economic staff - one got little support within AID for raising economic policy issues. One was left with the feeling that it was "undiplomatic" to broach such questions. And, in a sense, maybe it was undiplomatic to raise questions that neither side had the resources to treat in much depth. As a person with some economics training and understanding, I was certainly not alone in AID at that time. But, as overworked operators, few of us had the time to gather and analyze the necessary data.

Each of our projects were subjected to economic analysis and passed muster without gross fiddling. Since there was very little data, the outcomes of project economic analyses were quite sensitive to the methodology employed and the assumptions used. That probably didn't hurt the chances of favorable outcomes.

What we didn't and couldn't do at the outset was rigorously analyze the macroeconomic and sector economic policy and institutional issues bearing on our broad programmatic concept. Unless we were content to defer active engagement in Sahel development for

years, we had to proceed with a measure of faith that we could begin our engagement in the Sahel by addressing the most obvious problems and constraints which, as such, seemed not particularly sensitive to broad – as yet not fully understood or articulated – economic, policy and institutional issues. Later on we would better understand and, therefore, be able to address economic policy and institutional issues.

Although I'm not sure I ever heard it stated explicitly, I believe all of us were driven by a conviction that we were operating within a smallish window of opportunity opened by the vivid experience of the Sahel drought. We needed to capitalize on a fleeting receptivity of the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government and within the international community to create and impart momentum to a substantial Sahel regional development program. That window would close as the Sahel drought receded from recent memory.

The other part of the concept was to work in partnership with the Sahelians and our donor partners through two new organizations. The Sahelian governments had organized themselves into a body called the CILSS (the French acronym for Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel) in 1972 or thereabouts as they were beginning to appreciate the implications of the 1972-74 crisis. The CILSS had a Secretariat in Ouagadougou. In response, the donors – but particularly the French, the Canadians and the US – moved to respond by setting up a counterpart donor grouping called the Friends of the Sahel Club (Club des Amis du Sahel, mostly referred to as simply the “Club”) with a Secretariat hosted by the OECD in Paris. This arrangement began to take shape on an informal basis beginning around 1974. I believe 1976 was the year when it was formalized.

So, from one perspective, we were just plunging ahead without an adequate analytical framework. But from another perspective (and, I think, the correct one), we were moving deliberately to build such a framework on a collaborative basis. Working with the CILSS, the U.S. and other donors set up various Club-CILSS working groups or study committees (they were called “Groupes du Travail” and “Comités de Réflexion” in French) whose membership was made up of Sahelian and donor experts. These were typically focused on sectoral and functional issues. One was concerned with “Marketing Price Policy and Storage”. I can't remember the specifics, but others had to do with livestock and range management, river basin development, transportation, water resource management, etc.

Initially these bodies were preoccupied with the Sahelians' desire to set programs in operation and get resources flowing, but gradually their focus shifted to more policy-related issues. Thanks to donor initiatives a number of studies related to sectoral economic, and particularly marketing, constraints and issues were launched. They grew in number and began to produce findings that generated new perceptions on the part of both donors and Sahelians. One early study, carried out in the late 1970s by Elliot Berg, was entitled “Reforming Grain Marketing Systems in West Africa” under a contract with the Center for Research on Economic Development (CRED) at the University of Michigan. Another two were also carried out by CRED. One was called the “Red Meat Study”

(probably not its formal title). The other was on “Livestock Production and Marketing in the Entente States.” These are only a few examples of a considerably larger number of such studies. The earliest studies were typically launched to follow up on issues raised in project identification studies and design exercises or encountered in the course of project implementation. It was not unusual for consideration of highly focused studies to stimulate spinoff studies of broader or more fundamental issues. And, as the Sahelians could see that projects were actually starting up, their tolerance for and even interest in such studies gradually grew.

At our level, my staff and I had little time for anything except operations related to drought relief and recovery and to getting medium-term projects ready for approval and, once approved, under implementation. But we were also cogs in a bigger wheel. The CWR management structure consisted of Dave Shear and Irv Coker, respectively the Director and Deputy Director, and two Assistant Directors: one, Irv Rosenthal, for Program (i.e., Development Program) and another, Jim Kelly, for Relief and Rehabilitation. Each of the Assistant Directors had a small staff. Hal Gray and Clea Capoferri worked on Program matters. Herb Miller worked on R and R as a member of my team but in close coordination with Kelly.

When tapped for the Directorship of AFR/CWR, David Shear negotiated for and apparently received the closest thing I ever saw to carte blanche authority to make decisions. The funds set aside for medium-term projects were part of a special (“notwithstanding any other provisions ...”) appropriation and/or set-aside of emergency funds for Sahel relief and rehabilitation. They couldn’t be used outside the Sahel. David considered that he had the authority to approve all uses of these funds whether for projects or contracts with universities chosen non-competitively based on waivers that I believe he approved himself. This made for a very fast moving and free wheeling organization.

David, by the way, committed himself and us to follow Agency rules and procedures to the extent practicable. We mostly did so and I don’t think the quality of our work compared unfavorably with AID’s normal work. The main difference was that when we didn’t have all the information that was desirable, we were atypically relentless in using the available information to figure out a basis for moving forward, if necessary on a limited basis or timeframe. Most of our mistakes – and we certainly made some - should have been easy to correct based on good monitoring and evaluation during implementation. What we didn’t foresee was that it would take years before implementation and evaluation in the field could measure up to normal AID standards (which were also just getting reestablished after a period of revision).

David was — and, no doubt, remains — both a visionary and a breathtakingly energetic, decisive and creative dealmaker. From my perspective it appeared that David Shear operated in close coordination with the policy level officers of AID and State and in frequent dialogue with staff and principals on the Hill and in the Bureau of the Budget, in U.N. organizations and at the senior levels of a variety of donor organizations. He also conducted an active diplomacy vis-à-vis various universities – chiefly, Michigan (CRED),

Michigan State (the Agricultural Economics Department and Purdue. Each received contracts (or, maybe, grants) for various studies of which some were a bit loosely defined so they could respond to unforeseen needs. The part of his modus operandi that was most visible to me was his descent from the “mountains” every few days to spin off news of the latest developments and give follow up instructions.

Follow up could consist of funds to be allocated or allotted, projects to be developed, contract scopes-of-works to be developed or modified, waivers of competitive selection or U.S. procurement, briefing papers, cables, etc. to be prepared. We were the “his people” who called “their people” after deals were struck. The initial brunt of this fell on the two Irvs (Coker and Rosenthal), but I was brought in on these sessions fairly often. Every so often I went along in sort of a handler capacity on the various mountaineering expeditions. It was exhilarating, but it was also daunting. For me, at least, it was impossible, as I sat there reveling in the Olympian grandeur of the thing, not also to be mentally sorting through the workload implications and trying to keep my composure. One great source of satisfaction was that if one did a reasonable job of acting on the follow up instructions, one’s work was rapidly cleared by “the Irvs” and signed off on by David (if Ivana Trump had been a media personality back then, we might have called him “The David”).

But as the months stretched into years, the daunting aspect increasingly predominated. We all burned out at different rates. I think, though, that some of us became mesmerized enough to have difficulty recognizing it. This was a period when I spent part of each weekend plus one whole month of vacation time polishing off my dissertation. I think I acquitted myself honorably until the end, but as my two-year anniversary approached I definitely felt ready for my somewhat tattered soul to transmigrate to another incarnation, preferably overseas.

One of the things that detracted from the experience was the reaction of the other offices to the dynamism of the Sahel program. One dimension of it was sheer jealousy. No one had seen anything like it before in the Africa Bureau, and I wonder if the Vietnam Desk (which was more like a bureau) matched it for the pace of decision-making. I also noted that many begrudged the resources that were flowing into the Sahel. Although they were special, noncompetitive funds then, it wasn’t hard to imagine that at some point in the future funds earmarked for the Sahel would negatively influence the overall availability of funds for the rest of Africa. When I was offered a job by another geographic office in the summer of 1974 I remember its director strongly cautioning me against going to the Sahel program, implying (while taking care not say anything quotable) that Shear and his office were running wild and that he and his people would become pariahs when the Sahel declined in priority. Based on what I saw then and later, I have to say there was a lot of resentment of David Shear as a person. I think the main reason was that he simply refused to act like a bureaucrat. He took calculated risks with no observable hesitation. He worked like killing snakes, and his example was followed by most of his staff. I don’t think I ever saw the like. He was a “curve-raiser”, and we can all remember how that can be resented in a scholastic setting. I think some saw him as something of a traitor to his class. Also, they couldn’t believe that he wasn’t mainly trying to promote himself. (I

discount that. David may not be a particularly sensitive person, but he could certainly perceive that his task could easily turn out to be a thankless. He had the talent to go far without the unusual challenge of the Sahel program. Instead, I would say he was a driven overachiever – pretty frightening in someone of his talent - who was motivated by a desire to influence the course of history as much as anything else. I think he would have been happy to be either Assistant Administrator for Africa or AID Administrator provided either role were offered with an endorsement of his way of doing business and an expectation that he would apply it on a wider scale. The foregoing is my own reading. David and I never discussed his ambitions.)

But none of this slowed us down much. The Africa Bureau and central bureau technical and specialized staffs whose cooperation we needed partly believed in what we were doing, partly shared in the exhilaration of seeing their work rewarded by quicker-than-usual approval and implementation and partly knew that if they didn't engage there would be repercussions. Neither David nor Princeton Lyman, the Director of the Technical Resources Office, were reticent about confronting non-collaboration and both could count on strong support from the Africa Bureau and Agency front offices. We also had a technical staff within CWR, which spotty though it was, reduced our need to call on the technical staff of the Africa or central bureaus.

No picture of these days could approach completeness without describing the field staffing of the Sahel program. During the really early days preceding the drought, field management of the very few regional projects depended on a correspondingly light, Embassy-based staff structure. There were Regional Development Officers in Dakar, Niamey (Sarah Jane Littlefield) and Yaounde (John Koehring). When the drought took hold, Relief Officers (possibly not their exact title) were assigned to the staff of embassies in non-RDO posts. Jim Kelly served as Relief Officer in the early phases of the drought, but came to Washington about when I did in the summer of 1974. Terry Lambacher was Relief Officer in Niamey. I believe Jim Anderson worked on Mauritania relief but may have been based in Senegal.

During the early days of the drought, REDSO/WCA in Abidjan - with David Shear as its Director and Roy Stacy as his key (but by no means sole) collaborator on Sahel matters - played a key role. They played a key role in bringing Washington to understand the severity and extent of the drought emergency. Then they laid the intellectual foundations of what became formally known as the Sahel Development Program (SDP) by analyzing and documenting the agro-climatic and agro-ecological trends and issues pertaining to Sahelian development history and prospects. David Shear had been brought in to head up the CWR Office in 1974. Roy continued in Abidjan until 1975 or so when he went to Paris to join the nascent Club du Sahel Secretariat headed by Anne de Lattre.

It was not long after David's return to Washington in summer of 1974 that AID began to build up a field management structure consisting of strengthened Regional Development Offices (RDOs) and new Country Development Offices (CDOs). At the beginning, each CDO had a loose relationship to an RDO, but this rapidly lost practical meaning. The

CDOs were placed in Ouagadougou and Ndjamena. For the Western Sahel, I'm pretty sure that the RDO was in Dakar and the CDO was in Bamako, but it might have been vice versa. In Niamey and Yaounde, the two preexisting RDOs were beefed up. Before long we had as principal officers Norman Schoonover in Dakar, Ron Levin in Bamako, John Hoskins in Ouagadougou, Al Baron in Niamey, John Koehring in Cameroon (responsible for Chad) and, subsequently, John Lundgren in Chad. And we gradually assigned additional professionals. These were mostly program officers such as Gene Chiavarelli in Niamey and Glenn Slocum in Yaounde. But they also received additional technical staff such as Jim Livingston as Agriculture Officer in Niamey, a Range Management/Animal Husbandry Officer named Dilley, Mike White as Health Officer in Dakar and Al Henn as Health Officer in Yaounde, to name just a few. As these field units grew to resemble small USAID Missions, they received delegations of authority.

They also became parties to the development of the medium-term projects. I can't remember the details, but from this point on bringing the design and documentation of the medium-term projects to the point of readiness for approval became a difficult, slow and painful process. I remember it this way: The field offices were supposed to be at the center of the process because, if for no other reason, they had to manage project implementation. It was also their responsibility to work on this with their host governments.

However, they were understaffed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Many of the early field staff were French-speakers who had worked in the preexisting regional structure or had been recruited from those coming out Vietnam as our involvement there began to phase down. Some of them had good project development and program management skills. Some, who did not, learned pretty quickly. But too many of them were the types that the British damn with faint praise as being "good in committee." I take this to describe someone who is perhaps more articulate than intelligent and not very able or much inclined to grapple effectively with practical problems. Some of these people seemed to divide their time between sweet-talking their host government counterparts into unrealistic expectations and sending out shrill messages calling for others to do their project development work and, either explicitly or implicitly, calling for important technical and management concerns to be ignored. Interestingly, at the same time, it was like pulling teeth to get these same people to make use of the delegations of authority that Ed Dragon, Assistant GC for Africa and his colleagues, had worked so hard to secure for them.

But perhaps this unwillingness to "step up to the plate" and use the delegations instead of playing "Mother may I?" or continually asking "Why do we have to follow the rules?" or "Why can't we just make the Government and the Ambassador happy by doing something that can't be justified on any other grounds?" is more understandable than I would have conceded at the time. They were not full Missions and the field leadership largely owed their positions to their geographic office director, and that individual was an exceptionally strong leader and decisive decision-maker. So granting them delegations of authority (which were somewhat more circumscribed than those granted to directors of

full Missions) - viewed as a message that they should take more responsibility - was in conflict with their circumstances and with other signals they were receiving.

Another group of Sahel field staff deserves mention. These were former Peace Corps volunteers. They were picked up by AID at the end of their Peace Corps stints. Some of them had married Sahelians and had families to support. Because of their native intelligence, in-depth local knowledge, good connections, dedication and eagerness to learn many of them rendered invaluable service. But, inevitably, there were start up problems. Given that their newness was usually combined with self-confidence and high energy, they required a degree of supervision and mentoring that too often was not forthcoming from their direct-hire “elders and betters.” I remember that we received a cable from Niger in about 1974 reporting on some part of the country that had a particularly bad harvest and concluded with the news that the Government of Niger, therefore, “demanded” several thousand tons of food aid. Most of the people in the geographic offices of AID and State realized, after a moment’s reflection, that the cable was in “Français” and that “demanded” should be understood as “requested.” But most readers in the Food for Peace Office, PPC, Bureau of the Budget and USDA probably needed an explanation. Many of the former PCVs who worked for AID at this time went on to get postgraduate degrees and to have successful careers in AID or in the consulting sector. Some of these folks whose names come to mind are Louis Siegel of ARD, Laura McPherson who heads her own firm, Charlie Stathacos of Abt, Tim Mooney of Abt and Steve Wisecarver, now Director of REDSO/ESA.

Meanwhile, in Washington, we were caught between the need to uphold AID standards (as David Shear had pledged to do despite the discretion at his disposal) and to move quickly (which was why we had been granted the flexibility). We couldn’t do both and too often we failed to accomplish either. And, due in part to the previous pattern of AID’s regional programs being run by staff attached to Embassies, too many of the Ambassadors and even AID staff thought it was normal for Ambassadors to be involved in the technical and managerial aspects of AID’s work.

Nevertheless, by the time I left in mid-1976, we had reached a point where there were two-to-three medium-term projects in the early stages of implementation in most of the Sahel countries. This outcome owed a great deal to Technical Resources Office Director Princeton Lyman and members of his staff such as John Pielemeier and Graham Thompson. The same must also be said of the REDSO/Abidjan staff such as John Eriksen, Roger Poulin and, I believe, Martin Billings.

Again, I’m not sure I correctly remember the details, but I believe that one approach to the dilemma described above was to launch preliminary implementation-cum-design phases of some of these projects. That was the approach taken to the Eastern ORD (Organism Regional du Developpement) project in Burkina Faso. MSU was given the responsibility for completing the design and then implementing this project. David Wilcock was their team leader. Some of the medium-term projects received their initial funding from the regular development budget.

Q: Yes.

GILBERT: And so implementation of these medium-term projects and, thereby, further development of analytical frameworks needed to support our programs got underway.

Q: What kind of projects were these?

GILBERT: The medium-term projects typically consisted of cereals production, livestock production or herd rehabilitation, range management, integrated rural development or, at least, area-focused agricultural projects.

Q: These were regional?

GILBERT: A few were, perhaps, but most were structured as bilateral projects. .

Q: That's right.

GILBERT: But each bilateral country program - largely in parallel with those in the other countries - addressed the problems and constraints that were both present in that country and typical of the region. This would be true of needs such as improved varieties of sorghum and millet and seed production, though they tended to be one aspect of some larger cereal production or area development project. One unique livestock sector activity was the National Veterinary Laboratory in Mali. It produced vaccines for use in Mali and, to some extent, in other countries of the region. This activity was a constant in the Mali portfolio and, until things improved a few years ago, a constant headache.

At the beginning we were involved in range management in several countries. And these range management activities proved to be eye-openers for a lot of people. Previously livestock projects in the Sahelian countries had been mainly in the hands of veterinarians and were oriented toward livestock health issues such as protecting the cattle from diseases like trypanosomiasis and rinderpest. But these thrusts proved problematic because they tended to maintain or even increase livestock numbers without improving management of livestock and rangeland resources.

And there were livestock water supply components of some of these projects. A lot of bore holes and water catchment ponds had been put in during the drought emergency. This had its downside because the area around these water sources - which were new and, therefore, not taken into account by the customary range management practices of the herders - would get overgrazed. I think the dilemmas described above provided the intellectual impetus to add range management to our project portfolio. And that led to something I had never seen before. Michael Horowitz, who was from one of the New York universities, began to carry out "tent seminars" to tap into migratory herders' thinking and customary practices concerning range and herd management issues.

Q: Horowitz was from the Developmental Anthropology Institute.

GILBERT: Yes, that sounds right. But, I recall now that he came on the scene after we began to lose confidence in some of the methods applied in the earliest rehabilitation programs. These were largely conceived and carried out by people from places like Wyoming and Texas who tried to adapt U.S. practices to Sahelian conditions. I can't remember the details but it became apparent fairly quickly that it wasn't going to work.

So then Horowitz started having these tent seminars with the herders. The aim was to learn how their systems worked before trying to formulate improvements. It was really quite revolutionary at that time. The AID doctrine requiring social soundness analysis of all new projects came later. I wouldn't be surprised if our experience with the Horowitz approach didn't contribute to that innovation.

What came out of Horowitz' work was a realization that the social, cultural, legal-administrative and technical complexities of range management in the Sahel were sufficiently daunting that we couldn't intervene with an acceptable level of confidence. So we pretty much backed away from involvement in the livestock production sector in the Sahel. The main exception to that statement would be our involvement with the National Veterinary Laboratory in Mali. Minor exceptions occurred in the context of some of our cereals production efforts where we got tangentially involved in the livestock sector by financing some NGO-sponsored pilot efforts to promote animal traction. This involved not just the use of oxen, but also a mixed farming strategy to grow fodder for the animal and recycle the manure from the animals. It didn't spread very fast as far as I know. However, the French and the EEC continued to thrash around with big ranches and other "modern" approaches to livestock production.

Q: I believe the National Veterinary Laboratory also had a regional role. Let's talk about the regional aspects of the Sahel program.

GILBERT: Well, for example, we carried out some important regional studies of Livestock marketing through contracts with the Center for Research on Economic Development at the University of Michigan. One was called the "Red Meat Study." It focused on international and regional trade and grew out of concerns about an influx of frozen meat imports into the coastal cities of West Africa. The other was called the Entente Livestock Study. It focused on transportation, infrastructure and production as parameters affecting the regional trade in livestock.

I should point out also that we had a few small regional activities with each of the river basin authorities and with the Lake Chad Basin Commission. These were generally related to helping them to get their archives in order, carry out a few studies and to organize meetings of the member states. I believe other donors and, perhaps, AID began to carry out some preliminary studies of the Manantali Dam scheme.

One focus of the more general river basin-related studies was what was called in French, the “regime” of the river. They focused on the cycles of flow under during the year and under various conditions in order to be able to gauge hydropower and irrigation potentials and the infrastructure required to harness them. I believe the French government or French firms were beginning to study specific investments in the Senegal River Valley. I’m pretty sure they were the only ones involved in such concrete schemes. And I could be wrong about the timing. They may not have gotten into specific scheme development until the early 80s.

Q: Were you involved in the integrated pest management program?

GILBERT: Yes, I was. There were two pest management projects. I can't remember the details of the earlier one, but I got quite involved in the second. That was when I was director of the Sahel Office during 1981-83. I don't know if you want to get into that now.

Q: In Washington?

GILBERT: In Washington. But Integrated Pest Management wasn't on my radar screen during 1974-76.

Q: Well, I'd forgotten. It would be better to finish up on the Sahel.

GILBERT: Well, so in 1980, I came back to Washington after four years in Cameroon. I spent about six months building up and restructuring the Division in the Africa Bureau's Development Planning Office (AFR/DP) responsible for economic analysis, program evaluation and donor coordination before shifting to the Sahel office to become Irv Coker's deputy in the Sahel West Africa Office (AFR/SWA). When he left to become the Director of AFR/DP, I replaced him as Director. The Integrated Pest Management Project was one of our largest and most complex regional projects. I spent a fair amount of time on that project.

Q: Integrated pest management?

GILBERT: The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) project was the second of two regional pest management projects that AID funded in the Sahel. The first was called the Sahel Food Crop Protection project and was implemented under a PASA by USDA (It may have been the Sahel component of a wider regional project which was still underway in Cameroon until at least 1978 or so). I don't remember exactly when IPM came on stream, but it must have been around 1978 or 1979 because there was something like a midterm evaluation in about 1982. I believe the project had been in the design and pre-implementation negotiation stages for a couple of years before it actually got underway. It was a multi-donor-funded FAO project. The idea was that all the donors contributed funds to FAO for different facets of the project, and I believe FAO entered into contracts for different types of technical staff, carried out procurement, made sub-grants to participating governments, etc. The delays in getting the project started were largely

caused by protracted disputation between AID and the U.N. As I recall, the main issues were whether FAO would be the master implementing agent and manage donor funds (rather than just serve as the coordinating agency) and, if so, whether AID could audit the project. Once AID caved in on both points, a lot of paperwork was needed for the record to justify this approach on the basis that FAO operating and audit systems had been reviewed and found acceptable.

Q: These were issues even with regard to a UN agency? .

GILBERT: Yes. I'm not sure why because there would seem to have been a precedent in the West Africa regional onchocerciasis eradication project which the World Bank, in association with WHO, implemented using pooled donor funds.

Q: What was the point of the IPM project?

GILBERT: It combined technical assistance to national crop protection agencies with applied research aimed at developing methods of pest control that were effective, environmentally sound and economically sustainable at the farm level. It involved minimizing the use of agricultural chemicals and maximizing the use of things like resistant plant varieties, improved farming practices such as changing crop mixtures in ways that would help to control pests. Part of the attraction in the Sahel setting had to do with the fact that efforts to develop high yielding varieties of sorghum and, especially, millet had proved disappointing.

A lot of scientific and technical know-how on integrated pest management had been generated in Europe and America, but it needed to be adapted to Sahelian crops and conditions before it could be applied. I noted while participating in the wrap up of the midterm AID evaluation of IPM that a lot of ideology was also involved. Some outside members of the evaluation team presented themselves as taking professional risks in not making a fuss about elements of the project that they regarded as impure (my expression) and threatened to "go public" if they weren't accommodated on other points.

I thought the IPM project was a worthwhile project at the time, but I became even more of a believer later on when I worked in Sudan. There, the 2.5 million acre Gezira irrigation scheme used agricultural chemicals freely, pretty much on an industrial scale. And the more they used, the more they needed to increase their use because they upset the nature's checks and balances. Not only did they spend huge sums, they put huge amounts of chemicals into the environment. Agriculture in the Sahel was, on the whole, practiced much less intensively. Nevertheless, it seemed sensible to begin the process of developing low cost, environmentally appropriate ways to protect their crops. It would take decades of such work to unravel the chemical-intensive mess in the Gezira scheme.

But the IPM project was complicated, fairly expensive, very long-term and slow going. That's why it pretty much had to be undertaken on a multi-donor basis. As I recall the main concerns coming out of the 1981/82 midterm evaluation were that implementation

had lagged and that there was a certain amount of redundancy and rather loose management. I think there was a consensus within AID that the project had to be streamlined and focused more tightly on the highest priority endeavors. Tom Irving, by then a consultant, was the evaluation team leader. He also led the team responsible for redesigning the AID contribution. I went out to the field for the evaluation wrap-up in 1982. Then in 1983, I led the AID side at the meeting convened in Ouagadougou by CILSS and FAO concerning the redesigned AID project and, perforce, a retooling of the overall effort.

As I recall we pretty much got the changes to the IPM project that we wanted in our negotiations with FAO, CILSS and the other donors. The revised project was authorized in early fall 1983 at about the time I left for a new assignment in Tanzania. The next thing I recall was hearing about a year later that the project had been scrubbed on the insistence of Niles Brady, the Assistant Administrator of what is now called the Global Bureau. Let me correct his title — he insisted on and received the title of Senior Assistant Administrator.

Q: Do you know why he did it?

GILBERT: No, do you? I never got a clear answer, but I always suspected that it was, in some degree, a function of a right wing, atavistic dislike of the UN system. But the rationale had to be couched mainly in technical and managerial terms. Set up as it was, the project could only be influenced, not controlled, by AID. In addition to being too multilateral, it also took a lot of money. And I would guess that Brady thought AID's involvement in a delayed-impact, expensive, ideologically sensitive, science-intensive area exposed him, as the Agency's chief scientific and technology officer, to risks that were unacceptable. As witnessed by his success in placing himself one notch above all the eight or so other Assistant Administrators, he was not to be denied. I suspect Lane Holdcroft knows exactly what reasons were given for the decision and by what process (or circuitry) it occurred, but I've never thought to ask him. Someone else who should know is the person who replaced me as AFR/SWA Director, Dennis Chandler.

Q: Well, what other regional and bilateral projects were you involved in during this period?

GILBERT: By the 1980s, most of the RDOs and CDOs had become full Missions. The exceptions were Gambia, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau (which wasn't even a member of the CILSS during the mid-1970s). We had no presence in Chad during most of the early 1980s. We had a special Sahel appropriation of something over \$100 million. About two-thirds of that went to bilateral programs. The remainder went to regional projects such as IPM, some support to the activities of the river basin organizations and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, support to agricultural research, studies related to development in onchocerciasis-free areas and projects in support of CILSS and the Club du Sahel Secretariat operations. Some of the foregoing involved contributions to non-Sahelian regional projects, such as the regional sorghum and millet research projects (JPs 26 and

31, I believe) that operated in Sahelian and other countries' semi-arid zones. Given that the rest of Africa couldn't benefit from Sahel funds, care was taken to insure that the Africa budget didn't subsidize the Sahel program. In addition to our country desks, we had a regional program staff headed by an Assistant Director. That group also included a budget officer, a river basin officer and, perhaps, another project manager. We coordinated with AFR/DP, but also carried out within our own office some of the budget management functions that they exercised for the rest of the Africa Bureau.

Before I go into anything else, I might as well tell about the Sahel financial management issue. It became a major preoccupation and could have crushed the life out of the Sahel program, but for a quite heroic response on the part of a lot of people in the field and in AID-Washington.

Many, if not most, of the medium-term projects in the Sahel were managed by parastatal structures charged with area development, crop production or both. In Burkina Faso we had an Organisme Regional du Developpement (ORD) for each region and in Mali we had bodies with names like Operation Haute Vallée and Operation Mil Mopti. Sometimes these bodies were even set up expressly to implement donor-funded projects. I can't recall right off hand, how our projects were implemented in Niger – I think there was a body responsible for farmer groups (which were sort of proto-cooperatives). Because the host governments couldn't pay for operating expenses, these bodies were entrusted with limited amounts of donor resources to cover these costs.

Before I took over as Director, audits had been launched of some eleven such projects. Each audit found accounting problems concerning some of the USAID funds entrusted to these national bodies. Inspector General audit reports were distributed to the Hill as well as such executive branch entities as the Bureau of the Budget and the NSC. There was a major flap, and I was the lucky guy who had to produce a credible response to it. We had to prepare lots of briefing papers, replies to lots of congressional correspondence and responses to each audit recommendation. In our briefings and in Congressional correspondence we stressed that the findings didn't mean that funds had been lost or stolen, but only that there were problems with the "accounting trail," something that one could wish the audit reports had made more clear. We also promised a concerted effort to correct the problem.

Congress wrote into AID's legislation that Sahel funds could not be spent unless the Administrator certified that adequate accounting systems were in place for them. The Administrator delegated this responsibility to Frank Ruddy, the Assistant Administrator for Africa. I think the Sahel Audits "scandal" broke in 1981. As I recall, the certification requirement had to be met before obligated FY 1981 funds could be released for disbursement and before FY 1982 funds could be obligated.

The first and most important thing I did about all this was to hire John Bierke to fill a vacant position in the Regional Staff of AFR. His main responsibility – one that soon drove out all others – was to coordinate or carry out all the hands-on work of dealing with

this problem. Bierke just pitched up and needed a job about when I was beginning to appreciate the size and speed of this locomotive that was coming down the tracks. It was providential. He did an excellent job.

Q: Right, right.

GILBERT: Secondly, we set up a system such that before any funds could be released, the mission controllers - who could get whatever help they needed - had to satisfy themselves that whatever had been wrong was no longer wrong with these accounting systems. And then we had to have a system for handling the communications about all this with the missions, organizing the information when it came into Washington and for making use of it in ways that enabled us to move things along.

The third thing we did was launch a regional financial management improvement project. Jonathan McCabe and his staff, chiefly Roger Simmons, in AFR/DR quickly designed it and got it approved. It involved putting staff in each major Sahelian capital to provide financial management technical assistance and training to the staff of governmental and parastatal organizations. It focused initially on those associated with AID projects, but then broadened out to provide input into the broader program management systems. It also provided for short-term technical advisors who could trouble shoot and fix specific problems that controller staffs couldn't deal with. It was implemented under a USDA PASA that involved a subcontract with Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Jim Williams was the Chief of Party of the VPI team. This regional project entered a second phase and lasted about 12 years. I think most observers believe it had a positive and lasting impact. When I was in Abidjan as REDSO Director during 1990-93 every so often someone - including representatives of private accounting firms - who came to call on us would mention that they got launched in the accounting profession through the regional financial management project.

Q: It had a very positive effect. But there is a counter view of the Sahel audits issue to the effect that the "ten million dollars" allegedly stolen or lost was in fact not the case. That the auditors were not persistent in getting the documentation they claimed did not exist - that the documentation was there but it was in French and they just hadn't pursued it satisfactorily. So that was that.

GILBERT: I think that was true in many cases and in some others there wasn't an adequate accounting trail. But absence of an adequate accounting trail does not equate with embezzlement. One of the things I did, though, was hire Walter Furst and another consultant to go out and look at a selection of these cases and try to determine whether the money seemed to have been spent for the intended purposes. In other words were there items that were supposed to be paid for that weren't received or staff claiming not to have been paid or local allegations of how funds were misused? Using converging methods of fact gathering and analysis, they checked out a handful of cases and found no evidence of significant fraud. Their method didn't lend itself to finding minor leakage. And we weren't interested in laxity such as, for example, a project vehicle being used for

personal transport. So, I don't think a lot of this money got misappropriated or stolen. There was too much involvement of Americans and other expatriate technicians working hand-in-hand with the Sahelian managers. So, to the extent that the paperwork was unavailable rather than just being in French, I think it was mostly a question of fecklessness. And, one factor contributing to that was that financial personnel were accounting clerks rather than professionals. This meant they were not in a position to take issue strongly with professionals who couldn't be "bothered" to respect accounting rules. The new project addressed that problem and helped to correct it both by raising the skill levels of the financial staff and by instilling respect for financial management systems on the part of operational staff and managers.

Q: All right. You have some other observations on your experience in the Sahel and then I'd like to get on to the comment about the overall significance of the program. How did you judge it and so on? But what other dimensions of it do you feel were important?

GILBERT: Well, our vision and the vision set forth in the legislation governing the Sahel Development Program (SDP) was that it would encompass all AID activity in the Sahel and be governed by a strategy grounded in the challenges and opportunities of the Sahel as a region. That was the powerful and promising concept, but one that we could bring only partially to reality. It fell short of full fruition mainly due to conflicts that developed as the 1972–74 drought emergency faded from memory and the people who played leading roles in conceptualizing the SDP moved on to other assignments and were replaced by newcomers.

Q: Where was the focus of this conflict?

GILBERT: There were number of reasons for this. You might say that many of them were structural. That would imply that they were predictable, even inevitable. But, if I understand the dynamics now, it is largely a function of hindsight. I'm afraid it's a longish story.

First, some background. The main intellectual input to the early SDP came from the studies that were commissioned by AID during 1973-74. As I mentioned earlier, we funded several studies and I suppose other donors – particularly, the French – may have done the same. I mentioned the many project ideas that Sam Rea and I had to deal with. There was another list of project ideas (which overlapped only slightly with the list Sam and I worked on) that partly predated and partly was generated by the various Club/CILSS working groups. That list was poorly documented and most of the items seemed not to deserve much priority. But because the list emerged from CILSS-sponsored processes, it was sacred and the CILSS Secretariat was obliged to put it forward at every meeting with donors.

We had a small Sahel Development Planning Team (SDPT) based in Bamako. Until about 1982, it was headed by Larry Dash and was joined at about that point by Emmy Simmons. Both Larry and Emmy are economists. As I recall, it also had members responsible for education, health-population and livestock-range management. Their job

was to participate in the various Club-CILSS working groups and help them develop sector program strategies and plans. I don't recall that we envisioned an overall master strategy – that is one that would establish priorities among sectors and investments for all CILSS member countries. But sectoral planning documents – mostly menus of types or templates of projects that would be responsive to sectoral constraints and opportunities - began to emerge from SDPT members' interactions with the CILSS working groups. This represented progress because these project templates were much better conceived than those of the early CILSS list. Overall, the SDPT added a great deal of value to the deliberations of the Club-CILSS deliberations, often contributing useful analyses behind the scenes. My observation was that the representatives and staff of the Club and CILSS secretariats held them and their work in high regard. I believe the SDPT had been functioning for at least two years before 1980.

As the bilateral programs gathered intellectual momentum and the original offices evolved into conventional USAID Missions, the SDP's regional character gradually weakened. By the time I came back to the Sahel Office in 1981, the bilateral programs in CILSS member countries largely paralleled one another because they addressed common problems. But, viewed individually, they functioned about the same way as AID country programs did in most other Africa Bureau countries. They were implemented through the host government's public service structures or through semiautonomous bodies created by those governments. Whereas at the beginning, in the mid-1970s, the "menu" of bilateral projects was generated from regional processes (mainly regionally focused studies), with the passage of time their evolution proceeded increasingly from country-level thinking and planning. So linkages to regional processes and programs became less and less meaningful in practical terms.

There was a council or committee of Sahel mission directors' who met about every six months during my tenure. Increasingly that group included individuals who knew little and had less intellectual interest in the problems of the region. This element viewed the Club/CILSS institutions and processes with something between suspicion and outright hostility. Ambassadors placed great importance on the country programs and, perhaps even more than elsewhere, made the most of them in maintaining access to and influence with high government officials. I have the sense that that the Sahelian Ambassadors were more operationally involved in the bilateral AID programs than I have observed to be the case elsewhere. Thus, they tended to share, or even exacerbate, the negative feelings of some Sahel Mission Directors towards regional processes and influences.

But what lay at the heart of these tensions was the simple fact that the bilateral and regional components of the SDP were in competition with one another for funding. Funds from the single Sahel account had to be allocated among the bilateral and regional projects. The bilateral programs received about two-thirds and about one-third went to the regional program. And, since we never received as much as we asked for, each claimant received less than it considered necessary.

Of course, other factors were at work as well. Much of the regional budget supported the programs of CILSS and other regional institutions. These bodies were generally struggling to fulfill their mandates with staffs of mixed quality. It was pretty much

inherent in these bodies' mandates – especially those of the CILSS institutions – that they held frequent meetings attended by representatives from each member country and of the donors. When they addressed a problem, they would commission one or more studies and these would provide the initial focus of a regional meeting. These reports would be reviewed eventually at the national level and this would often lead to an additional round of discussions at the regional level. Often there would be follow up studies of whether and how the regional issue manifested itself at the country level. This made sense in that it gave empirical ballast to the group deliberations. It also generated a sense of ownership and changed thinking among interest groups at the national level. But there was no denying that this was not an efficient process. Much (not all) of the work was done by a Sahelian subgroup of what the French call “conferenciers” whose main qualifications were that their governments could spare them, but whose influence in their own capitals varied, and, among some, was distinctly questionable. Even so, the process required some involvement of highly competent member government officials. Since these same officials were valued counterparts, such diversions were felt at least as strongly by country-level USAID and other donor program managers as by the upper echelons of the member governments.

The return on all these comings and goings and circulation of papers was deeper understanding of the development issues on which they were focused. The ultimate aim was to build consensus among Sahelian governments and the donors concerning the policy and program implications of these issues. This payoff was achieved in some cases. Unfortunately, the frequent travel and its costs were more visible to USAID bilateral program managers than the national-level advances in thinking on region-wide development problems. And when the new thinking was apparent, it was sometimes inconvenient since existing USAID projects were typically predicated on earlier, sometimes outdated, perceptions and were, due to the rigidities of the AID project design and approval system, famously difficult to redirect. This fits with an observation that I was able to make later during visits to Sahel countries as REDSO Director and, still later, as a consultant to AFR/SWA. I noted that the diffusion of program ideas from the regional to the national level from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s owed more to NGO initiatives, often with AID-funding, than to conventional AID programming.

Those of us who had responsibility for the regional program saw the negatives in the Club/CILSS performance of its functions clearly and sought to remedy them through technical assistance and by advocating administrative reforms at Club-CILSS meetings. We had some success, but it was always a two-steps-forward-one-step-backwards process.

But we also had a different perspective from that of the detractors. The CILSS bodies were clearly infant organizations. Even so, they were at least as effective as most national level bodies. They fulfilled needed functions. It was not just a matter of improving national-level thinking on development issues and strengthening development programs within the region. The CILSS system had to take root in the political-administrative culture of the Sahel governments. Otherwise there would be little chance that regional

cooperation could generate regional development prospects to compensate for the region's environmental and climatic liabilities.

I count it as a great failure on my part that I never managed to get the Africa Bureau to buy into this view of the regional aspect of the SDP. I think you and, after you, DAAs Ray Love and Frank Correll largely saw the merits of prudently nurturing the Club/CILSS system and other regional approaches to truly regional problems and opportunities, but the Assistant Administrator would become testy if one tried to discuss it with him in unbiased language. If I tried to persist, he dismissively conveyed that anyone who failed to perceive that it was all rubbish was delusional or, worse, afraid to confront the truth and, therefore, a wimp. I think I was correct in judging that it was dangerous to provoke him and that he was constitutionally (and, perhaps, politically) incapable of any other posture toward the SDP's regional aspects than one of muffled hostility. Given his attitude, there could be no question of the Bureau's renewing its earlier active support. The pressures on my time, and that of my management team, were such that we really could not afford to undertake a work of patience (i.e., trying to bring him around) that seemed to have a better than even chance of blowing up in our faces.

I should digress for a moment to say that, by late 1982, our workload situation had been rendered nearly insupportable. I have already mentioned the financial management certification and audit report response processes that we were grappling with. In addition, Africa Bureau-wide (and probably Agency-wide) staff cuts forced us to reduce the AFR/SWA staff complement from something like 24 to 17. As I recall, the staff cuts were from on-board strength, and we were already somewhat under strength due to vacancies.

If that weren't enough, we had major tensions and staff morale problems due to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) issues. They started when a minority member of our regional staff who had been selected by my predecessor to head up its program budget side was advised that Personnel (or some authority) had disapproved the necessary conversion of the position to a General Service, rather than Foreign Service, designation. She had been acting in the position for many months. I frankly was not sorry at the development because I had been very disappointed in her performance while she was in an acting capacity. Unbeknownst to me, the Assistant Administrator told her that she would be promoted nonetheless in some unspecified way despite the negative ruling about the conversion of her position.

Sometime later, one of the Special Assistants to the AA/AFR called to say that the employee had asked them about the status of her promotion and to ask me what I was doing about it. I replied that I had never heard of the idea, did not agree with it and couldn't see how I could implement it, even if I wanted to, without being extremely unfair to other members (also minorities) of the SWA staff. Some hours later that employee herself raised the question with me. I told her as gently as possible what I had told the Special Assistant. That night or the next night I had invited the entire office staff to my house for an office party and not a single one of the minority staff of the office came. Shortly after this the AA/AFR began to talk about "management problems" in our

office. The AFR/SWA staff member in question left our office a few months later. In about 1984 (a year after I had left AFR/SWA for an overseas assignment), I heard that she had been promoted in another office and that a very able co-worker considered it so unjustified and unfair that he left the Africa Bureau in protest.

Also, a minority senior secretary was assigned to our office even though she hadn't coped successfully with a similar job in another office in our Bureau. She didn't cope in our office either and made no serious, consistent effort to improve. If I gave her any feedback she would disappear for days. I requested that she be replaced on the grounds that she couldn't take the pressure we were working under. I was ignored. I concluded that the only option remaining was to document her inability to perform. Shortly after I began that process, she was moved to the Management Office. I was allowed to recruit a replacement, and the minority person we recruited was a wonderful addition to our staff and helped greatly to turn the situation around. Meanwhile I was required to accept a minority Deputy Director. He was a wonderful human being, but never really learned our business and instead spent all his time representing minority interests on Agency-wide committees, working groups and task forces. Nevertheless, he helped to improve staff harmony and morale within our office. He was also instrumental in improving our standing with some other offices that had no other way of determining that we were not seriously off base on EEO issues. .

Though the EEO situation gradually settled down, the fact remained that we were extremely shorthanded in relation to our workload. We also continued to have EEO issues. One memorable one involved a minority female clerical employee who understandably resented her decent, but socially awkward and insensitive, supervisor's asking if she were pregnant. In his retreat before her reaction, he managed as well to refer to her unmarried state. We also had a professional who refused to perform his functions and accused his supervisors of racism if they took issue with his unexplained hours-long absences. I think the SWA staff credited my Deputy and me with handling these properly because morale among the minority employees continued to improve. I don't think the attitude of the AA/AFR was subject to change.

So no help would be forthcoming from the front office in remedying the bias in the Africa Bureau's budgetary planning processes in favor of the bilateral over the regional components of the SDP. Allocations in the Congressional Presentations (CPs) were only barely adequate to the needs of the SDP regional program while those for the bilateral programs were more so. As the budgets went from the planning to the implementation stages, the overall amount for the SDP declined. The bilateral budgets were hotly defended by State because each Ambassador wanted to defend the level for his or her country. This was seldom a function of support for the goals of individual projects or programs. Instead it reflected each bilateral program's symbolic value as a token of the recipient country's standing in the foreign policy priorities of the U.S. Government. This concept may have been around to one degree or another "forever", but the rigor of its application during the early 1980s was related in part to a drive within the State Department to rationalize the "management" of U.S. foreign policy by rigorous

application of State Department strategies and programs for each country and regional bureau. This State Department exercise hardly ever encompassed the substance of AID's own strategies and programs, but instead mainly focused on AID levels.

Though the DAAs were reasonable and open-minded individuals, they were not in a position to give us much support on this issue. It was a question of what we could do to solve the problem at our own level. Fortunately we discovered something that allowed us to keep the SDP regional program functioning. State was extremely sensitive to the relative amounts allocated to Sahel countries individually, but was not tracking the relative amount allocated to the regional budget versus the aggregate amount for the bilateral programs. Therefore, when DP gave us new, inevitably lower total SDP budget levels to work with at various stages in the budget year, we occasionally redressed the balance between the combined bilateral programs and the regional one in favor of the latter. But that was not enough to prevent the regional program from being considerably under-funded.

I knew then that good management would arguably dictate cutting one or more regional projects to relieve the pressure on the surviving projects. But I frankly couldn't figure out which should be cut. Also, trying at my level to cut a regional project would have been a long drawn out and acrimonious process given the number and types of stakeholders involved. But the clincher was that there was no reason to believe that pressure on the remaining projects would be reduced. In the climate of the times any amount saved probably would have been removed from our regional budget.

Another problem area pertaining to the regional program was river basin development. Plans for various studies related to irrigation, flood control and hydropower schemes in the Senegal River basin were beginning to mature and gather momentum. The Senegal Mission was presenting us with funding requests and issues that we couldn't effectively deal with. They had a staff member, Vito Stagliano, who functioned as a river basin development officer. We had a person, Dayton Maxwell, who did an excellent job of managing AFR/SWA's interest in river basin matters, but there was no one in the Africa or other bureaus whom we could call on to even spot, let alone resolve, the kinds of technical issues these proposals posed. (As I recall, both Vito and Dayton picked up most of what they knew about river basin development in the course of their work in the Sahel) David's proposals were for incremental steps and mostly seemed reasonable to me. Yet they cost a lot of money. Some – especially those who resented the regional program and regarded these Senegal basin activities as a grab of regional funds by the Senegal Mission – wished, no doubt, that we would “just say no”. But that would have been a betrayal of a major premise of the Sahel Development Program - that river basin development would make the region food secure and economically viable.

Actually, one person in the Africa Bureau did have some previous experience with river basin and irrigation issues. Ray Love (the senior member of the troika of DAAs who replaced you) knew some university and other experts (one was Dan Hoben) and arranged for them to review the river basin development plans and prospects in the Sahel. Those

most closely involved in the conduct and review of these survey assessments were Shear's Senegal Mission, Ray Love, Glenn Slocum in AFR/DR and Dayton Maxwell in our office. I believe they were completed about when I was getting ready to hand over to Dennis Chandler and head off to Tanzania, and I didn't really get involved in the follow up. I do recall hearing that these assessments found that introducing irrigated agriculture among a population with little or no prior conditioning to its requirements is a long and complicated process and that the challenges on the socio-cultural and legal-administrative sides are at least as great as those on the technical and economic sides.

We did go along and provide limited funding for some of the Senegal River Basin Organization (OMVS) activities that David Shear proposed. But they were scaled back to support progress on essential increments while deferring commitment to subsequent increments pending the results of additional studies and promised actions by other actors. All of this meant that river basin development was not likely to play the sweeping transformational role in the Sahel that we had envisioned in the mid-1970s.

Meanwhile, grumbling by Sahel Mission Directors and Ambassadors began to grow in volume and became more pointed. I can't remember a particular communication, but I came to understand that they wanted a review of the SDP. I worked with the SDPT and a few of the more senior and skillful people in AFR/SWR (including Dayton Maxwell, for sure) to produce a review. I can't remember exactly how we went about it but we did make a genuine effort to address the main questions and issues as we saw them. We circulated our draft review and got little response. I remember seeing a message from one Sahel Ambassador to another (which reached me accidentally) that called it "anodyne." Maybe it was. It argued for some changes in emphasis and approach but recommended continuation of the SDP regional program in its essentials. I never saw any refutation of our arguments or facts. My interpretation was that, as a group (allowing for purer motives on the part of some individuals), their object was not mere reasoned dialogue, but something more concretely beneficial to their bilateral programs.

When I left the Sahel West Africa Office in early fall 1983, our overall SDP funding level was somewhat reduced, though still over \$100 million and was under severe funding pressure. I had the distinct impression that there was little positive interest in the SDP regional program within AID (however, when we briefed Hill staffers and people from OMB or the NSC, they always seemed very positive about the SDP, including its regional component).

The SDP and, especially, the regional program posed challenging management problems. The Club/CILSS system of policy dialogue and programmatic consultation was cumbersome and difficult to keep to a predictable schedule. Therefore, it often presented us with surprise demands on our time and energy. It was difficult to engage the Africa Bureau technical offices in the process, and AFR/SWA (mainly me) and the SDPT in Bamako had to attend a large number of meetings and speak for AID. We did so without benefit of coordinated position papers and, more often than not, with only a little informally established guidance. This probably seems incredible, and perhaps indefensible to the reader, but we were very shorthanded. We were scrambling every

minute to meet the demands of the programming process and, for the last year or so that I was in that job, there simply wasn't anyone to whom I could delegate Club/CILSS matters. I had the same problem concerning the core AFR/SWA management responsibilities, not because there was no one with requisite ability, but because of the urgency and magnitude of others' workloads.

So the SDPT members and/or I often participated in Club/CILSS processes based on positions that we had worked out ourselves with occasional input from field or AFR/DR technical staff. I think we mainly did this usefully and responsibly, but it shouldn't have been necessary to handle it the way we did. It was damn uncomfortable and more than once I was reminded me of a visit to Cameroon by former Attorney General Elliot Richardson when he was representing the U.S. at the Law of the Sea Conference during the late 1970s. In a briefing to U.S. Mission staff, he said that the Carter administration was not really paying attention to the Conference and that he was simply doing the best he could under the circumstances. He was worried that this would prevent the U.S. from ratifying the treaty, and his fears turned out to be justified. The negative outcome that I feared was that, when the politically appointed echelon of the Africa Bureau and the Policy and Program Coordination Bureau did focus on the SDP and the related Club/CILSS processes, there might be a destructive reaction. I tried to guard against this by reporting on developments in cabled reports to the Sahel missions and AID/Washington (when reporting from the field) following major meetings and in the biweekly reports we submitted to the AA/AFR and the Administrator. I didn't try to give special briefings to the AA/AFR nor use the weekly Bureau senior staff meetings for that purpose. I knew the AA/AFR knew of my activities and would have asked for a briefing if he wanted one.

Q: You were there during Goler Butcher's tenure as assistant administrator? Or no?

GILBERT: Yes. She was still the AA/AFR during the first six months or so that I was in Washington during 1980s. That was when I was restructuring and building up the economics and evaluation division of AFR/DP. I think she left just shortly after I moved to AFR/SWA as Deputy Director.

Q: Right.

GILBERT: And I think you stayed around for a time after Goler Butcher left, perhaps an additional six to eight months. I have the feeling that I had been AFR/SWA Director for about two months when you left.

Q: Was there some aspect of the regional perspective embodied in the regional programs that was really not viable? Was there a weakness in the SDP and the regional part of it in particular that made it vulnerable to criticism?

GILBERT: I'm not sure there was anything wrong with it.

Q: But it was a multi-cultural effort rather than a national effort?

GILBERT: Yes, and I think the problem was that it needed to be resold.

Q: New people who did not know its history had come on board and therefore they were less...

GILBERT: That is right. Most of the first round of mission directors and other staff who had been around since the mid-1970s had bought into the SDP concept or at least had come to terms with it. They realized that, even if the SDP and its attendant regional processes could be frustrating, its novelty and attractiveness (hopefully born of real promise) were what had made the new bilateral programs possible and well funded. But as that group became diluted with newer arrivals, the proportion that saw the value of the SDP declined. Within the newer group, most no doubt saw the need to keep SDP concept, but there was less and less willingness to consider its funding needs on the merits. I'm talking about tendencies within a varied group. Among the older group, the mission director in Niger for instance had been skeptical of it from the beginning. It was always challenging to deal with him on SDP regional issues because he was knowledgeable and not just negative. He helped to keep us on our toes but was not obstructionist. Some of the other, later arriving Mission Directors were too hostile to the regional and multilateral aspects of the SDP to even engage intellectually and understand it.

But, to be brutally frank, in my opinion the fundamental problem with the SDP regional program was that it tied up money that some wanted to see allocated to bilateral SDP programs. And even though the regional processes associated with regional SDP were not particularly inefficient or disorganized compared to the national processes associated with bilateral program operations, they were more visible and, therefore, more vulnerable to criticism – especially in the right wing, anti-multilateral culture that was seeking to impose itself on the Africa Bureau and, to a lesser extent, the Agency at that time.

Q: Was there any change in the political circumstances or political economics of the area that would have suggested a shift in interest in the regional perspective among the Sahelians themselves?

GILBERT: You mean that would have justified us changing our point of view?

Q: Well, a shift on the Sahelians' part away from the regional perspective to a more national one would have given grounds for a similar shift in our perspective.

GILBERT: Well, now that you mention it, I suppose that some of the same things were happening within the national governments of the Sahel. No doubt it was also true that there had been a thinning of ranks of Sahelians at the national level who had participated in the formulation of the Club/CILSS system as a common response to the drought. Thus, there would have been fewer individuals among that group who understood and valued the SDP as a multilateral concept.

And I think something else happened in Niger. I think the Nigeriens let their uranium deposits in the north of the country go to their head. I believe that the political appointee Ambassador (who worked for a company involved in exploiting them before Reagan was elected) fed that tendency by proposing that ESF (Economic Security Funds) be allocated to Niger based on some sort of cold war rationale. For whatever reason, the Nigeriens were sometimes awkward to work with on SDP issues. But I can't recall anything parallel to that happening in Mali. There, President Traore's government began to attract higher levels of bilateral aid because they were the first to see the need for economic policy reform. Yet I believe they remained good members of the multilateral SDP "church."

Q: And the SDP regional projects made sense in economic terms?

GILBERT: I think they made about as much sense in economic terms as most of the other things that AID was doing. But, they were typically "less" bread and butter in nature, and, with their pay-offs being longer-term, their economic justification depended more on risky projections and assumptions than was typical of bilateral projects. In my opinion their main weaknesses – and here I'm thinking mainly about the irrigation-related activities – lay in the areas of technical feasibility and social impact analysis. It simply turned out that the regional aspects of the SDP made more sense at the conceptual level than in their practical details. As a professor of mine (Charles Kindleberger) used to say, "Everything turns out to be more complicated than most people think." That turned out to be excessively true of the SDP.

Q: Okay.

GILBERT: Also, as I mentioned, most of the projects started out with little reference to the economic policy framework or the importance of markets. However that was pretty typical of AID projects during the 1970s. And, that gap was being addressed through the Club/CILSS policy study and dialogue processes and mechanisms.

Q: Right. Were you involved at the time of Elliott Berg's work on cereal pricing and things of that sort?

GILBERT: I knew about them, but had little direct involvement. I think it might have been starting about when I left in 1976 and had been around for a while when I returned to work on the Sahel in 1981.

Q: That was a policy issue.

GILBERT: Yes it was, and it was addressed in the context of the Club/CILSS policy study and review process. I think it was actually commissioned for, if not by, one of the working groups or study committees. Somewhat later MSU's Carl Eicher and his people began working on cereals markets also. And the Berg and MSU work confirmed that there were major flaws in the Sahelian policies and strategies concerning food aid and food production. And thanks to these studies, these issues were debated in the

Club/CILSS committees and working groups. These regional debates were soon paralleled by discussions at the national level. And the thinking on these matters of Sahelian governments and USAID bilateral missions began to change for the better.

Over a period of years, these studies and the ensuing discussions raised awareness and led to improved policies in a number of areas. They confirmed what many knew or feared. The Sahelians were hooked on food aid and the donors were both too dilatory and too forthcoming in providing it. The Sahelians and donors tended to respond to alleged needs based on alleged supply shortfalls in a context of calculated national requirements, of which some were highly politically determined. No distinction was made between food availability and access and no allowance was made for the fact that income from non-cereals crops and livestock products could be used to buy cereals both at the household and national levels. Regional trade was viewed as threatening. Most governments were willing to countenance imports of supplies that they needed, but were unwilling to see a portion of their cereals production be exported unless they could be sure that it was a net surplus to their national requirement. The idea that surplus areas of their country might export to deficit areas of neighboring countries and that their own deficit areas might import from surplus areas of neighboring countries was foreign. And, as I mentioned earlier, they had little tolerance for market forces, and viewed prices as legitimate or illegitimate based on accounting considerations. But as a result of the work of experts such as Elliot Berg and others from MSU, Purdue, AIRD and Abt Associates as well as roughly equal numbers of Sahelian and other donor experts associated through the Club/CILSS system, these issues were analyzed with the result that policy improvements gradually became major focuses of national and donor development strategies and programs.

In the context of all the unreconstructed thinking about cereals trade, markets and prices the Sahelians through the CILSS decided that they wanted to set up a regional grain market stabilization system. It may have been called a storage system, but the discussion of its use was internally inconsistent as to whether it would be used simply as a reserve stock in case of emergencies or for market interventions. Also, no coherent philosophy was provided concerning its operation. Meanwhile, they were a long way from having any shared ideas concerning the proper role of the national agencies they had created for this purpose. Only the Malians were showing signs of using these mechanisms for any purpose beyond trying to assure low staples prices for urban populations.

Q: And this was an FAO initiative?

GILBERT: Yes. And the FAO, still under Saouma, took on its familiar role as lead advocate and got involved. I believe, to their credit, the Club Secretariat adopted a posture of no more than polite, noncommittal interest. I believe there were meetings in Rome and in one of the Sahel capitals. I asked Larry Dash and Emmy Simmons of the SDPT to analyze the pertinent documents and attend the meetings with me. We used the meetings as an opportunity to raise what we believed were all the right questions and made ourselves somewhat unpopular with the Sahelian agriculture ministers and the

FAO. As I recall, the advocates were not prepared to discuss the questions we raised, and the subject was dropped. I seem to recall Lane Holdcroft telling me a few years later that it was raised again after I handed over to Dennis Chandler, but once again the specific proposal was dropped. However, analysis and discussion of national and regional cereals markets, including the role of trade and prices, seem to have taken off in the mid-1980s. I would like to think that had something to do with the rather pointed discussions we had concerning the regional cereals storage and/or market stabilization system.

Q: Did you work with the Club du Sahel; were you involved with that operation?

GILBERT: Oh, yes.

Q: What kind of operation was that? Was it an effective instrument for coordination of donors?

GILBERT: Its main function was as the instrumentality for representing the donors as a group in working with and supporting the work of the CILSS. On the whole it was quite effective. Anne de Lattre was very effective as the Director of the Secretariat. Roy Stacy and, following him, Art Fell both worked well with her as U.S. Representatives on the Secretariat. I think there were two other donor representatives, probably a Canadian and a Dutchman, who worked with Anne and Art. They were supported by a small staff of no more than three experts who mainly worked on studies and documentation, including translation. They managed a fair amount of donor funding. When the Club and the CILSS agreed that a topic needed to be analyzed in the CILSS framework, they would generally organize and finance the required study using international and regional experts. Then they would work with the CILSS in planning the regional meetings that would follow on the studies. They and the CILSS did a good job of this.

While it would be easy to snipe at the Club for little things (sometimes not assuring enough notice of meetings, etc.), in my opinion, it is very difficult to second-guess the Club Secretariat on the important things. But I can think of two possible serious criticisms. One might find fault with some of the topics they chose to pursue. Donors had the opportunity to enter objections at meetings and in between meetings but, given that there were a lot of donors, we understood no one donor could always have its way. The rub was there were neither formal ground rules nor a very transparent process for reaching decisions about Club activities between Club donor meetings. I suspect that this meant that the Club pretty much did what it wanted to because any “doubter” donor could be made to feel like they were alone. I personally never felt the Club was wrong enough to take a strong negative stand.

Another criticism of the Club might focus on the weaknesses of the CILSS and blame the Club for not doing more to remedy them. But to be fair, an “accuser” would have to specify what the Club could reasonably have done, but had failed to do. Here again it is important to remember that the Club was the creature of the donors (even if the donors had a hard time keeping abreast of its activities). Therefore, it cannot be reasonably

blamed for making more of the CILSS' weaknesses than the donors were prepared to insist upon. Some of the donors saw the CILSS as a political organ that fulfilled its function simply by existing and legitimizing the common effort. The U.S. viewed it as also a technical organization and had higher expectations.

During my tenure as Director of AFR/SWA, I poured a fair amount of energy into getting the CILSS system reformed. And, frankly, I don't recall much other donor support for the U.S. position. We were not talking about dramatic stuff, but rather incremental improvements in the way they did things. I worked on this with Dick Meyer who, as Mission Director in Ouagadougou, was responsible for day-to-day liaison with the CILSS Secretariat. Our position took account of concerns raised by the Sahel Mission Directors in their semiannual meetings. We also discussed our concerns with the Burkina Faso Minister for Rural Development (or the equivalent, who was then Chairman of the CILSS Council of Ministers) as one step along the way to presenting our concerns formally at a CILSS Annual meeting in Praia, probably around fall of 1982.

My memory of the issues we wanted addressed is far from perfect, but I'll give you an approximate idea of our concerns. One irritant between the CILSS and the donors was the Secretariat's behavior concerning the list of projects that had been prepared by the CILSS in the mid-1970s for financing as part of the SDP. Some of the projects on the original list had made considerable sense and these had long since been financed by the donors either as stand-alone activities or as components of larger projects. As to the more respectable items that remained, these were sufficiently numerous that they could never be fit within the priorities of a program of the size that the donors' funding would support. As I remember it, few of the listed ideas could be dismissed out of hand. At every meeting with the donors, the CILSS Secretariat put the list on the agenda and argued for funding it. Their posture was that the Sahelian Ministers in their wisdom had established (they didn't quite say "legislated") this list and that the donors needed to do their part and finance it. The donors couldn't bring themselves in a public meeting to reject the list in its entirety, so they would suggest that it be prioritized and that the most important projects be put forward for review in depth. There would be no follow up between meetings, and the same list, perhaps with two or three additional items, would be brought up at the next public meeting. I can't remember how we phrased it, but we wanted this list prioritized and focused and discussed as necessary with the donors in working groups rather than postured over in formal meetings. We also wanted the CILSS to concentrate on addressing technical and economic policy issues and to put mendicancy on the back burner now that there was no looming crisis and the main issues were of a longer-term nature.

Some of the fault for this lay with the controversial Executive Secretary at the time, a Mauritanian named Mame Seck. He didn't have many ideas and seemed to think that he could best build his standing by being a tenacious advocate, not to say a "fighter." At one point, I thought I could build a cooperative relationship with him and get him to buy into our concerns and sponsor some needed reforms himself with our support. It was only

when I realized that this was a lost cause that we decided to bring our concerns formally to the Annual Meeting of the CILSS.

There were also other problems that we wanted addressed. One was the arrears in member countries' dues payments. Another was related to it: the Secretariat's borrowing to maintain staff levels and operations. The resulting chronic need to juggle temporary financial and administrative arrangements distracted the Secretariat from substantive concerns and reduced their accountability for operating in an orderly fashion. There was too much crisis management, insufficient clarity of staff responsibilities and a tendency to try to do too much. Secretariat staff members were also prone to embark on ad hoc exercises, often at the behest of various donor projects. Meanwhile we wanted the CILSS to support the campaign we were launching to strengthen financial management within the region and to follow through energetically and systematically on the food security and related agricultural sector policy issues that were being identified and analyzed in various studies.

So these were some of the concerns we wanted to address in a speech that I gave at the CILSS Annual Meeting in Praia. We (Dick Meyer; Jim Anderson, who was AID Rep for Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde; and Samir Zoghby, a member of Dick's staff and one of the more original characters who ever worked for AID, and I) arrived in Praia several days before the meeting. We wrote the speech in coordination with Anne de Lattre, the Director of the Club du Sahel Secretariat. She helped us to avoid diplomatic shoals and reefs with the result that some of our points were made a little more obliquely than we first intended. On the whole, I think we sacrificed little of substance, and the final product was the better for her input. I recall that the "compte rendu" of the meeting suggested that the CILSS understood our main points, took them to heart and either intended to follow through or wanted us to believe they would.

Even apart from the merits, we would have been foolish to cross swords with Anne de Lattre without very good reason; she had very long legs within both her own French Government and ours. Whenever she visited Washington she stayed with Jeanne Kirkpatrick, who had been her roommate at Barnard College.

A quick story about Anne will illustrate that she is not a person to be underestimated. When Roy Stacy was assigned as the first U.S. Representative on the Club Secretariat he decided that a masterful way to begin their working relationship would be to take her out for lunch. She graciously agreed, but wanted to suggest the restaurant. He said, "Of course!" When, after their sumptuous repast, he called for the check he was told, "It's on the house." It turned out that Anne owned the restaurant.

Q: What do you think the Club and the CILSS contributed that was most useful?

GILBERT: Well, I think the greatest value produced by the Club and the CILSS is best illustrated by their sponsorship and exploitation of studies such as the Berg Cereals Marketing Study that we discussed earlier. In that context I should also mention another

study that made a major contribution to the rethinking of Sahelian economic policy frameworks. The Recurrent Costs Study came at many of the same issues from another direction. That study may actually have been the most valuable initiative on which they collaborated.

We and the other donors to the SDP had, when the medium-term projects were launched in the mid-1970s, accepted that we would have to finance local operating costs for an initial period, but expected that we would be able to phase down these contributions over time as the Sahelians increased theirs. I'm afraid that we saw this as in large part a matter of getting the national governments to budget realistically. No doubt, we also assumed that they would be better able to do this once these rural development projects led to increased production and income among farmers and herders and among agricultural processors, transporters and traders. The Recurrent Costs Study was already underway when I returned to AFR/SWA in 1981. When conceived, it was mainly seen as a way of getting the Sahelians to focus on the issue and think through the steps they would need to take in the areas of budget planning and in tax administration. Once the instigators began planning in detail, they must have realized that its implications were much more profound. Otherwise, they would probably not have contracted the task out to three Universities: Harvard, La Salle and Montpellier. Nor would they have been likely to entrust the coordination function to Clive Gray at Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID). I always wondered if they weren't being a little disingenuous in continuing to call it the Recurrent Costs study. This title helped them to "fly under the radar." The Sahelian national governments would probably have been quite nervous if they had realized the full range of issues to be examined.

The Recurrent Costs Study documented that the Sahel governments simply could not cover the recurrent costs of the SDP projects without either cutting back their financing of operational costs of other government activities and services or without raising additional taxes. Cutting back was not really an option. They already were making a minimal effort to provide core government services, and what the Francophone countries did provide was largely dependent on budgetary subsidies from the French. The only economic activities not overtaxed, were unreachable due to weaknesses in tax administration. And the level of taxation on reachable economic activity virtually guaranteed economic stagnation in the rural sectors.

To raise additional taxes would require an overhaul of their tax systems and of the policy framework for the agricultural sector. Most existing tax revenues came from tariffs and excise taxes on external and internal trade. These, plus a panoply of regulations restricting the movement of goods and services and on commercial and industrial activity, had created a situation wherein producers had little choice concerning their purchases of inputs and their sales of output because few commercial enterprises were licensed to engage in these activities and because government regulations as well as taxes on commercial operators tended to keep input prices high and producer prices low.

The only people who paid income taxes were civil servants and the tax schedules were so progressive as to virtually eliminate incentives to entrepreneurs. So what they needed to do was at least: 1) liberalize the economic activity in the agricultural sector by freeing up trade in inputs and produce, 2) either abolish agricultural price setting or ensure that price policies provided adequate incentive to producers and traders, 3) overhaul the income tax structure so that it provided incentives for entrepreneurs and would be enforceable and 4) improve administration of the revised tax codes. There were additional needs such as encouraging regional trade over international trade where appropriate, but I don't think these were touched on more than tangentially at that time.

The context in which this happened was interesting. This draft study began to be reviewed in 1981. In the wake of the study Elliot Berg headed up for the World Bank and well before the Reagan administration came in, AID had already begun to realize that it needed to give more attention to economics and economic policy frameworks. I believe the effort to strengthen the economics and evaluation staff of AFR/DP that I worked on represented a step in this direction. When the Reagan administration came in they also fostered this emphasis, but seemed unable to acknowledge that it was underway before their advent. I also remember feeling that there was little acknowledgement of the recurrent costs study and the potential it offered for policy dialogue in the Sahel. Various offices in AFR received copies and were invited to comment. But the thing was massive and there seemed to be little AID engagement with it outside AFR/SWA. There was no official smile or frown, it was basically as if it took place in a parallel universe. Maybe it would have been different had we formally asked the Bureau to approve our intended use of this study or if its recommendations should be adopted. But we didn't do that because it was part of a multi-donor process and the Sahelian governments and donors would meet to consider what weight they wanted to assign to its findings and how these should be applied whether we participated or not. And, of course, it would have been a disaster if we activated an AID review process whose duration or outcome tied our hands and either prevented or clouded our support for the Club/CILSS review process. My Sahel colleagues (including the SDPT and some Sahel Mission economists, such as Jay Smith in Burkina Faso) and I were satisfied that the report was empirically based and that its analysis was sound. So, as so often happened, our participation in the Recurrent Costs Study review went forward without much reference to, or involvement by, AID/W.

The first Club/CILSS-sponsored review of the draft Recurrent Costs Study hosted by the CILSS Secretariat in Ouagadougou was the occasion of my first field trip following my return to the Sahel office in about January of 1981. I think we spent three days on it. At times the debate got pretty heated. And the Malians were the ones who seemed most opposed to it. As I recall, they denounced all this as being a neocolonialist attempt to impose capitalist ideas and practices that weren't appropriate for African societies whose poor had to be protected from the depredations of unscrupulous middlemen and other exploiters, etc., etc. The other delegations were more circumspect in their comments and gradually seemed to come around to seeing merit in the Study's arguments and recommendations.

A really interesting thing happened on the last day as we were hammering out the agreed report of the deliberations. When we came to some of the points that had most bothered the Malians a non-French European donor representative, outdoing himself to be sensitive to the Malian concerns, strongly advocated watering down some of the substantive findings that were listed as being worthy of consideration by national governments. This would have been unfortunate, and it produced an awkward moment of silence while the rest of us pondered how to disagree without giving undue offense either to that gentleman or the Malians, each no doubt hoping that someone else would ask for the floor. But, after only a modest pause, the head of the Malian delegation asked for the floor to say “No, thanks!” They wanted the text left exactly as it was. He gave no explanation, but we soon understood. The report of the meeting was to serve as a sort of issues paper for national-level reviews in member state capitals. Even though they had been good soldiers and defended Mali’s then current posture, they wanted to make sure their government would fully appreciate and confront the issues raised by the study.

To come back to your question and as we discussed earlier, this kind of policy review and dialogue was played out over and over again in the Club-CILSS system of study groups and working groups. Policy issues and needs were studied and discussed among representatives of Sahelian governments with the international people present mainly in supporting roles, as experts, facilitators or donor representatives mainly in observer roles. Once a study and its implications were reviewed at the regional level, it would usually be reviewed at the national level in a similar fashion but with Sahelians from the CILSS Secretariat or from Sahelian consulting firms playing the facilitator and expert roles along with some of the members of the national delegation who had participated in the regional review. This was a novel method of pursuing policy dialogue, and I believe that it worked. Without it and without the Cereals Marketing and Recurrent Costs studies I doubt that the bilateral programs in the Sahel could have focused their programs on agriculture sector policy reform to the extent they were able to.

It is worth noting that, of all the CILSS-member countries, the Malians launched the most far-reaching and genuine process of economic policy reform centered on the agriculture and related-sectors. Within a year of the Recurrent Costs Study review in Ouagadougou, we began to hear of very interesting developments in Mali. The government and donors set up something called the PRMC, which stood for the Cereals Market Reform Program. The PRMC administered food aid from a variety of donors including the U.S. The food aid was sold and the counterpart funds were programmed for mutually agreed purposes. It started modestly and proceeded in an incremental fashion, but over a period of years the policy framework and institutional landscape of Mali’s agriculture sector evolved considerably. I won’t claim that the Recurrent Costs Study was the magic bullet responsible. There were a number of influences, including Elliot Berg’s study of cereals marketing that had been similarly used within the Club-CILSS system. And each contributed. If there’s anything we’ve learned about policy reform and policy-based programs, it’s that crude leverage does not succeed without significant commitment to the changes on the part of host country leadership. I believe the Club-CILSS process was

highly useful for producing un-coerced commitment to needed reforms that greatly enhanced the feasibility and the utility of bilateral policy-based programs.

Q: Anything else on policy dialogue and policy reform?

GILBERT: Based on some of the discussions within AID/Washington about the need to move toward non-project, policy-based assistance and on my gleanings from the Recurrent Costs Study review, I drafted program guidance to the Sahel missions suggesting they begin the long process of examining the policy problems that constrained our efforts and consider whether non-project assistance would be an appropriate mechanism for addressing the identified needs. I asked them to cable their views before entering into dialogue with their host governments. I also discussed this in one of my six-monthly meetings with the Sahel mission directors. The guidance cable that I drafted never went out. As I recall, I sent it around for simultaneous clearance by AFR/DP and AA/AFR as well as, no doubt, by others. I don't recall that I ever got either specific comments or clearances. I did get the impression that they didn't want the Sahel missions or AFR/SWA to get out in front of the rest of the Bureau. I'm pretty sure that the Africa Bureau never managed to issue complete guidance on this subject during my tenure as Director of AFR/SWA. We went through a long period when Tim Bork of AFR/GC would give contrite status reports at various meetings on his seemingly fruitless and interminable efforts to reconcile some provisions in our legislation with the intrinsic characteristics of non-project assistance. Unfortunately, I don't recall the exact problem.

Meanwhile, at least one Sahel Mission Director, David Shear in Senegal, was moving forward to develop policy-based, non-project assistance proposals. We had no prescribed format for gaining preliminary approval, so his staff simply invented something. I think there may have been more than one such proposal. With some justification, he seemed to feel that if we were on the ball we should be able to get him the Africa Bureau guidance and responses to his proposals that he needed. But, alas, the relevant other offices of the Bureau would not be hurried. This impasse created tensions between our office and David. I can't remember all the details, except this was not the sole source of friction between David and the Africa Bureau and, to a lesser extent, AFR/SWA. But tension continued to build, and David took early retirement at about the same time I was getting ready to go to Tanzania in 1983.

Q: Are you satisfied that the activities in the regional program belonged there rather than in one or more bilateral programs?

GILBERT: For the most part, yes. The regional program activities mostly fell into the following categories: (a) support of Club/CILSS structure and aspects of its regional program such as AGRHYMET, (b) support for the planning and analytical activities of river basin authorities and (c) provision of centrally managed technical resources focused on regional problems common to multiple Sahel countries. The nearest Sahel mission could have managed most programs of these types, but they would not want the funding included in the "level" for their country. The regional program was in part a bookkeeping concept, especially for types a and b. However, type c projects like IPM needed to be

regional unless there were to be separate technical assistance and coordination structures to support each country's pursuit of IPM, and this would have been duplicative and unnecessarily costly in time and money for both the host governments and the donors. The main gray areas were those into which some of the Senegal pilot irrigation schemes fit. They were sponsored in some degree by the OMVS, but I believe they were situated entirely within Senegal. It could be argued that these should have been included in the Senegal "level."

Q: Do you feel that the high per capita levels of assistance from the U.S. and other donors to the Sahel was justified?

GILBERT: Well, that is a very hard question to address. Certainly when you look at per capita aid flows to the Sahel compared to most other African countries during the late 70s and early 80s, the Sahel levels were pretty high. But, I seem to recall that per capita levels from all donors to Tanzania and a few other countries were similar or higher. The argument for putting money into the Sahel was that it was necessary to give this region the capacity to withstand future droughts, not so much that it had great development potential. Except for the fact that we knew that droughts occurred at average intervals of no longer than 10 to 15 years, we could have taken our time. But there was a sense of having to move with "all deliberate haste." Also we were dealing with a part of the world that the U.S. and, to lesser extent, the other donors (except the French) had largely ignored prior to 1974. So, if the Sahel was getting a higher than average per capita aid flows in the late 70s and early 80s, one could argue that it was high time or, at least, not unfair. Thus, there were reasonable arguments at a conceptual level for allocating large amounts of U.S. assistance to the Sahel.

I don't recall any systematic effort to quantify either the Sahel's needs or our expectations concerning the timing and magnitude of the expected outcomes of our assistance. If we had been doing this (not to say that I personally would have had the requisite information, skills or time), then we might have been able to determine as we went along whether our rationale continued to be valid and, if not, whether we were doing enough or too much. But the Sahel is the last place where one can aspire to that sort of precision.

I suppose a sort of moment of truth arrived after my 1983 departure when it became clear – probably in 1984 or 1985 – that large-scale expansion of irrigated agriculture could not play its previously assigned role in transforming the Sahelian economies. At that point, the problem of raising the Sahel's food security status to a new plateau became a different sort of problem than envisioned at the outset.

Meanwhile, somewhat before this point had been reached, nominal U.S. funding levels for the SDP had begun to stagnate and decline. Given inflation and population growth, this gradually eroded the per capita aid flow issue. If, instead, irrigation's role as the engine for rendering the Sahelian economies food-secure had been confirmed in the mid-1980s, increased funding levels would have been required, and regional funding for other

priorities such as river basin authority programs and IPM would also have had increased priority.

This is as good a place as any, I suppose, to admit to a failure on my part. We had been told in about 1982 that we should produce a strategic plan for the SDP. This was being requested of bilateral programs all over Africa, including those in the Sahel. I don't recall receiving specific written instructions for this task, however. Cabled guidance did go out to country Missions. The instructions called for a much more conceptually integrated and analytically rigorous approach than previously followed. For our part, we were told verbally that our product should encompass both SDP regional and bilateral problems and opportunities and come up with a master strategic plan containing an integrated set of program priorities for each sector, encompassing regional and bilateral program elements.

I didn't decide at the outset not to follow through, but the task was so complex I couldn't figure out how to approach it. This included not knowing on whom I could safely rely as point person. The SDPT was already heavily engaged in other urgent tasks, including, I believe, supporting some of the bilateral missions' strategic planning exercises. Also, the new approach requested by AFR/DP far surpassed in sophistication the concept of strategy development that the SDPT had been applying up to then. I think I discussed it with the SDPT leader. Whether I did or not, it was clear to me that determining an approach to the task would take a large block of my time. As I rolled this problem around in my mind while dealing with other issues, I noticed that I never heard anything further from AFR/DP. And, I have to admit that I didn't remind them of the informal discussions and seek to agree on an approach. I suppose I wanted to propose a workable approach rather than ask an open-ended question or try to beg off. I felt that the product they requested was desirable, and I wanted to undertake it if I could figure out how. (I usually find that I come up with solutions to problems that I can't solve immediately if I let them "percolate" for a while. My "eureka" moments usually awaken me about half way through the night.) But that didn't happen in this case. Either consciously or subconsciously my strategy became one of hoping that AFR/DP had either forgotten about or lost interest in the master SDP strategic plan that they requested earlier.

Of course, just as I was getting ready to depart AFR/SWA, AFR/DP asked where the master strategic plan for the Sahel stood, and I had to admit with a red face that we hadn't started the process yet. I was embarrassed and unhappy, but to this day I feel more chagrin than guilt. Also, to this day, I still find myself wondering how I could have avoided this "default." This may sound silly or self-serving. One might think that I would simply have carved the time out of my schedule to either develop an approach to the strategic plan or confess that I could not bring it off. My failure to do so can only be understood in the context of how overstretched we were, particularly how overstretched I was without a substantively competent deputy, with a much reduced office staff (down from 24 to 17 professionals), with the financial management "scandal" and related certification process in full swing and a host of competing demands on my time, not the least of which was supervising negotiations on a complicated amendment of the of the multi-donor, regional

IPM project. Something had to give and the thing that gave was the thing I couldn't figure out how to accomplish.

It was a salutary experience in one sense. I never again allowed myself to become so enmeshed in operational needs that I lost the ability to be proactive in meeting the external demands on any unit that I managed. I was in danger of being in that position a few times, but each time I acted to correct the situation before my back was to the wall.

Q: What about the Club du Sahel as a mechanism for coordination? It was quite a unique endeavor.

GILBERT: Yes. In general, I think it was a good approach, though I sometimes chafed at their methods. Whenever one went to a meeting, a draft compte rendu would be presented for adoption on the last day. I often wondered if this document had been prepared before the meeting even started. It usually seemed in retrospect that the meeting had been relentlessly driven along the course it recorded. Even though this is how I felt, it was not really much of an issue. After all, it was the usual approach to consensus-building in such settings, and the unpardonable sin would be for the Club/CILSS multilateral meetings to lead to either to no consensus or a muddled one. And the process was sufficiently genuine and open that the draft comptes rendus were subject to substantive change at the insistence both of donor and Sahelian delegations.

Because the Club Secretariat was in Paris and because many of the staff as well as the Director of the Secretariat were French, I wondered if the French Government saw the Club as an instrument of its policy. Whatever the answer, I don't think this was in fact the case. I always felt that Anne de Lattre was pretty much her own woman. Though I felt she mostly succeeded in doing what she thought was right, managing her own Government's expectations must have been an important challenge of the job. The temptation for the French to feel excruciatingly clever had to be present. They had managed to get other donors to accept a major share of the burden of assisting their former colonies in the Sahel, and there was a coordination mechanism that served to focus that assistance on food security and other, mainly rural development, priorities. This left them free to focus their technical and financial resources on areas such as finance, trade and commerce, national education and central health systems that were more sensitive to their interests.

But having shared these dark ruminations, I also have to say that it was, overall, a good instrument for donor coordination. My experience is that donor coordination is constantly talked up but seldom realized in a very meaningful fashion. And these efforts too often focus on operational coordination, which is devilishly difficult because of disparate donor planning and budgeting cycles, rather than on harmonizing donor objectives and approaches. But when donors' objectives and approaches are genuinely harmonized, this too often undermines or even effectively usurps the planning and programming functions of the recipient governments or encourages and facilitates their abdication of that responsibility. The Club, working with the recipient governments through the CILSS, emphasized harmonizing the program objectives and approaches of both the donors and

the Sahelian governments. As the process matured, joint review of the cereals marketing and recurrent costs studies resulted in a gradual convergence of thinking about various policy reform issues. For the post-Marshall Plan era, it marked a breakthrough in the history of donor and donor-recipient coordination at the conceptual, planning and technical levels where it counts most. (Under the Marshall Plan, recipient governments were required individually and collectively to formulate economic policies and programs for the U.S. to review and approve for funding.) Given the capacities of the Sahelian governments, the Club/CILSS framework and process came about as close to the Marshall Plan system as possible.

Q: Why do you think the donors wanted to coordinate? Why did they want to participate in it if it took time and resources to do it? Why were they interested in supporting the club?

GILBERT: It was easy to understand the French point of view. They had a tremendous financial stake in the area and they were glad to have company. For them the Club provided a mechanism for both encouraging other donors to share the burden and keeping them intellectually on the reservation, so to speak. For the other donors, the impetus to coordinate through the Club probably had a lot to do with the rapid increase in the combined and individual assistance levels. In a typical country the donors have been working in their respective patches for years and coordination is important only when one them moves into a new area. But in the Sahel all the donors except the French were implementing quantum increases in their assistance levels on a rush basis. And they were doing so in a region where they had relatively little experience. Thus they needed to coordinate to avoid operating at cross-purposes or duplicating one another's efforts. In addition, where there is a sense of uncertainty and risk-taking it is only human to seek both comfort and safety (and, in case of mistakes, cover) in numbers.

Q: What about the U.S. interests in the Sahel? It wasn't very strategic, I guess. There wasn't much political security interest. Or was there?

GILBERT: I truly believe that the people who were behind it in the U.S. bureaucracy basically saw this as an opportunity to increase aid to Africa in an area that had been neglected in the past and would be again in the future unless they could harness the sudden humanitarian interest occasioned by the drought emergency to attractive longer-term prospects. And there was a good rationale at hand. The idea was that prophylactic assistance to develop the capabilities of the area would diminish the scope of future drought emergencies and the scale of emergency assistance needs. The nearest thing to a real politik rationale might have focused on the potentially destabilizing effects of mass migration of Sahelian populations into the coastal West African countries if life became too harsh for them.

Q: Was there any Cold War motivation behind this for the U.S.?

GILBERT: I hope I'm not being naïve, but I frankly don't think so. Right offhand, the only countries with much East Bloc presence or involvement were Cape Verde and

Guinea-Bissau. They were pretty marginal members of the CILSS, and they received pretty small amounts of assistance. If Cape Verde got more than its proportionate share – and I'm not saying it did – it was because of the substantial Cape Verdean immigrant communities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Q: But what about the political context in terms of the Administration's and Congress' interest in assistance? Did that have any significance for this at that time? This is what...during the Carter administration?

GILBERT: Well, it was during the dying days of the Nixon administration and throughout the brief Ford administration that the Sahel development program got set up and acquired its multilateral quasi-legal personality and institutional trappings as well as its U.S. legislative mandate. I suppose its financial and operational momentum developed during the Carter years.

As to your question about the kinds of Administration and Congressional interests involved, something comes to mind that may at least be partially responsive. It seems to me that the surprising thing is that Congress and the Administration would sanction a new, additive flow of U.S. development assistance to a previously ignored area that was on the sidelines of the cold war proxy struggles in Africa. This is pretty out of character. The only explanation I can think of for its occurrence in this instance (as opposed to others where better substantive arguments could be made that the U.S. should support long-term development) may have to do with the earlier humanitarian effort. There had been a great deal of public support for the U.S. response to the 1972-74 drought and famine. In fact, U.S. public opinion did a lot to galvanize the U.S. into responding at the outset, and I can tell you that there was a fair amount of suspicion among some in the Black community that we weren't doing enough. Meanwhile, since then we have learned that the man in the street strongly supports humanitarian assistance even though he is alleged not to favor development assistance. The rationale for the SDP was an extension of that for the humanitarian assistance of 1972-74. The SDP was sold as a preventive approach to emergency humanitarian assistance. It may also be that there was greater susceptibility to the implied altruism because of the national trauma generated by our experience in Vietnam. It may also be that the SDP, with its multilateral character and the overtones of partnership with the French and other European donors resonated with or supported some aspect of U.S. policy toward Europe. But I really don't know what that might have been.

Q: Well, why don't we pause here?

GILBERT: I think so. I can't think of too much else to say about the my "Sahel years."

Q: In between your two periods in the Sahel, you had another assignment. When was that?

Four years in USAID/Cameroon - 1976-1980

GILBERT: I went to Cameroon in 1976. And I spent four years there.

Q: What was the situation in Cameroon at that time? Why were we having a program?

GILBERT: Cameroon was treated as an honorary Sahelian country during the Sahel drought and in its aftermath. Yaounde was the site of one of the Regional Development Offices (RDOs) that we talked about earlier. RDO/Yaounde had responsibilities for Chad, which became a CILSS country, and for the Central African Republic (later Empire), Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. During the Sahel drought, the RDO was responsible for administering emergency assistance for Chad and, to some extent, for Northern Cameroon, which has a lot in common with the Sahelian countries. Cameroon was the route of choice for shipment of food assistance to Chad. It traveled by rail from Douala to Ngaoundere and then by road to Ndjamena. Some of the bilateral projects on the books when I arrived there in 1976 bore all the hallmarks of Sahelian medium-term projects.

Q: But they were not included in the Club du Sahel.

GILBERT: Cameroon was not a member of the CILSS and, thus, did not participate in the Club/CILSS forums.

I was assigned to Yaounde as Deputy Regional Development Officer, replacing Art Fell.

Q: It wasn't a full mission at that time?

GILBERT: No, it wasn't. I think there were only six U.S. direct-hire officers. John Koehring was the Director. Al Henn was the Regional Health Officer. Norm Greene was the Regional Human Resources Officer. John Woods replaced Glenn Slocum as the Regional Program Officer, arriving at about the same time I did. Tex Ford arrived not long afterwards to serve as the Regional Agriculture Development Officer. I can picture the guy he replaced, but I can't think of his name. Then somewhat later Eric Witt arrived as an Agricultural Economist International Development Intern (IDI). Tridib Mukherjee, who later became a direct-hire, was there as a project technician, I believe. There was no Management Officer at the outset. That role was pretty much exercised by John's Administrative Assistant and John himself. For someone whose previous field service was in Ghana and Nigeria, it had a distinctly "mom and pop" feel to it. We were really busy with developing the new elements of the program while also winding down the earlier generation of regional projects.

Q: Was it rightly called a regional office?

GILBERT: Yes. The office was responsible for managing a number of regional projects that covered Chad, CAR and Gabon as well as Cameroon. These projects focused on health training and disease control, agriculture, livestock, development administration training and low-cost housing. These projects may have covered Equatorial Guinea in

principle, but not in practice. Equatorial Guinea at that time was still “Heart of Darkness” country under Macias, who was a real monster.

Q: Not the Congo?

GILBERT: Congo-Kinshasa or Zaire always had its own full bilateral Mission until the late 1980s. But, now that you mention it, I’m surprised that we weren’t given some responsibility for Congo-Brazzaville, but I’m quite sure that we didn’t have it. Maybe that country was totally off AID’s radar screen. Alternatively, USAID-Kinshasa may have covered it.

Soon after I arrived, in about November 1976, we handed over all responsibility for management of AID projects in Chad to John Lundgren, the Director of the Country Development Office there. I believe my first field trip involved accompanying John Koehring to Ndjamena where Lundgren was just setting up shop. When we pulled into the compound that contained both his office and his house, he was literally crawling around well up in a large tree for reasons that I can’t reconstruct.

I recall that there was a certain tension in the air about what the relationship would be between that office and us. I think there may have been some uncertainty whether we should retain some kind of substantive oversight function. As it turned out, apart from some financial management backstopping, our main responsibility for support of the Chad operation was to help assure the movement of project commodities and, occasionally, emergency relief supplies to Ndjamena. There may also have been an understanding that our technical experts might be called upon for advice from time to time, but I don’t recall that that ever amounted to much.

Q: Did we have bilateral programs in each of these countries?

GILBERT: Bilateral programs were to be developed in Cameroon, Chad and CAR, but not in Equatorial Guinea or Gabon. I mentioned the problem with Equatorial Guinea. Gabon had too high an average per capita income to qualify for AID assistance.

Q: So you were shifting away from the regional programs.

GILBERT: Yes, in part. Most of them were coming to the end of their intended spans. These included Central Africa Livestock and Meat Marketing, National Advanced School for Agriculture (a Cameroonian institution that served the region as well), Gabon and Cameroon Low Cost Housing and the Pan African Institute for Development (PAID). Our nascent bilateral program in Cameroon consisted of some projects that were, in effect, medium-term projects and were similar in thrust to those coming on stream in the Sahel. Projects in this category were North Cameroon Livestock and Agriculture Development (earlier known as the Mindif-Moulvedaye Project), North Cameroon Seed Multiplication, and North Cameroon Rural Health Service. But other bilateral projects represented continuations of Cameroon-based elements of regional projects. These included University Center for Health Science (CUSS), Practical Training in Health Education and

Cameroon Low Cost Housing. Meanwhile at least one regional project, PAID, continued as such. This made quite a diverse portfolio. Given that and the challenge of working in a Francophone environment, it was an exhilarating experience.

Q: How was it different?

GILBERT: Well, a number of things come to mind. One is the formality and fussiness of Francophone administrative culture. I worked there for four years. Even two or three years into that period, many Cameroonians still addressed me as "Monsieur le Directeur Adjoint." They addressed one another that way as well. If they felt playful or informal they might exaggerate one another's titles. I can remember the Secretary General in the Ministry of Economy and Plan and one of his colleagues calling one another "Mon General." And there was never a question of getting beyond that to being on a first name basis. If one developed a genuine relationship with a Cameroonian, it would only lead to calling one another by family names, as often as not still preceded by "Monsieur". The French generally went rather quickly to that stage, but I can't recall being on a first name basis with more than about five French and Cameroonians with whom I sang in a madrigals group. At first, not wanting to sound officious, I would introduce myself as "Gilbert" rather than "Monsieur Gilbert." I can still remember the stricken looks this produced on some Cameroonian and French faces. Gilbert is more common as a first name than a family name among the French, so they thought to themselves: "This crazy American is introducing himself to me by his first name and must, therefore, be expecting the unthinkable – that I respond in kind! Quelle horreur!! I soon learned to quickly add, "Frederick Gilbert." If I said "Fritz" instead of "Frederick," that would chew up a couple of additional minutes because it would never be heard properly the first time or two, so that went by the boards. All of this is not to say that I didn't develop strong relationships with a fair number of the Cameroonians and the French. Eventually one got used to the veneer of formality and attached no undue significance to it.

Also, it was really striking to me how denatured some of the Cameroonian civil servants seemed as Africans and how hard they worked at being cosmopolitan. Every time we signed a project agreement there would be a little ceremony and out would come champagne and canapés to celebrate the occasion.

Another thing that struck me was strictly Cameroonian and/or Central African and had nothing to do with language or administrative culture. We were developing and implementing quite a few new projects, and this required that we negotiate on a variety of small and large issues with Cameroonian middle managers. Most of the time it went more or less as well as one would expect in many other African countries. But, from some of these individuals, we ran into a buccaneering, "what's-in-it-for-me" attitude that you had to see to believe. It was shocking how crudely interested some of them were in the commodities as opposed to the substance of the project. We were often pressured (unsuccessfully) to provide vehicles for use by officials who had little responsibility for the activity in question. With these types I sometimes had the strong feeling that if one

were alone with them and safe enough from other ears, there would have been a blatant demand for a “backhander.”

It brings to mind an old saying to the effect that it takes generations to produce a gentleman. I believe most of the people who were civil servants in Cameroon had adequate formal educational backgrounds. But a very high percentage of them were members of the first educated generations of their families. Education and gentility don't necessarily correspond any more than affluence and gentility do, but I think these guys were the first in their families to find roles in the modern sector. In contrast, the fathers, and sometimes the mothers, of many of the Ghanaian and Nigerians with whom I worked had been clerks, teachers or other professionals. And some of them came from families with long histories of education and modern sector employment.

But this difference may only be part of the explanation for what I observed. I believe the other part is that the interior sections of the country had been subjected to rather harsh brands of German and French colonial administration. Both colonial powers' reliance on forced labor for public works caused much illness and many deaths and left a legacy of bitterness that Cameroonians would occasionally and fleetingly mention. I noticed also that the police and gendarmerie behaved in more frankly predatory fashion than was common even in Nigeria. We never sent people, especially those without official passports, on field trips without arming them with Ordres de Mission (a “To Whom It May Concern” letter explaining the purpose of the travel with several impressive looking stamps on it) to protect them from harassment en route. I believe that the combined effect of these factors was to create a gulf between grassroots Cameroonians and their government and to furnish them with examples of anti-social modern sector behaviors. As for those who lacked countervailing influences in their upbringing and education, it is regrettable - but not all that surprising - if they came to the modern sector ill prepared to behave as we would think proper. That's what I believe lay at the root of my encounters with a minority of Cameroonians who were called upon to represent their country but, instead, mainly represented themselves in a pretty shabby manner.

It seemed to me that the Cameroonians who came from the North or from the Coastal parts of both the Francophone and Anglophone sections of the country seldom exhibited the quality that I found so startling. I also should reiterate that I worked with many civil servants from the remoter parts of the country who exhibited all the dedication and integrity that one could hope for.

One of the most striking things about the Cameroonians as a group compared to the Ghanaians and Nigerians is how little given they were to jokes and laughter. As one who has actually been informally reprimanded by at least two bosses for being too much given to levity, I felt this difference acutely.

Maybe the most important thing about the Cameroonian Government was that it was overstaffed and under-skilled, especially at the lower levels. The reason for this was historical. The Anglophone parts of Cameroon, which had been governed by the British as part of Nigeria under a U.N. trusteeship, voted in 1961 to join newly independent

Cameroon. That result was a federation of the Anglophone and Francophone parts of the country. In 1972, a few years after a procommunist rebellion had been bloodily suppressed, Cameroon was declared a unitary state. This meant that the government of the Anglophone part was abolished and its workforce was integrated into the national civil service. This resulted in massive overstaffing except at the higher skills levels. At the lower end, most had little to do and lacked French language skills. However skilled and motivated some of these people might have been at the outset, most had long since succumbed to apathy by the time I got there. On entering the ministry buildings one walked among clerical workers who were openly sleeping on their typewriters. The average level of activity rose gradually as one went up the grade scale. At the professional levels, the staffing situation shifted from surplus to shortage.

Q: What were the main lines of our program that you were working on at that time?

GILBERT: Let's see. In agriculture, we were concentrating on the Northern Cameroon-focused Seed Multiplication and Livestock and Agriculture projects. These dated back to the immediate post-drought period. The Seed Multiplication project was, I believe, started with emergency funds and then gradually grew in scale and evolved into a conventional, more broadly focused seed project. Later we got involved in agricultural research and agriculture planning projects at the national level. The North Cameroon Livestock and Agriculture project was known locally as the Mindif-Moulvedaye project after the two districts where it started. It had both animal health and range management components. It seems to me that we had a lot of trouble getting it off the ground. While John was still there we hired a young guy named Ric Carron to develop an implementation plan with the concerned agriculture officers in the northern center of Garoua. I can't recall clearly what happened, but I can remember moving forward in an incremental way using mainly short-term technicians on preliminary logistical and infrastructure improvements, such as drilling wells and setting up watering points. I vividly remember that we were having trouble finding water until some international expert using the local equivalent of a birch rod, on an unpaid basis, told us where to drill. (Sander Levin, then AA for the Science and Technology Bureau who was passing through on a visit, took the rod and planned to use it as an example of appropriate technology when he testified before Congress.) John left in late 1977, and I was Acting Director for about a year until Jim Williams arrived.

Q: As the director?

GILBERT: Yes, as the Director around the beginning of 1979. Some time in early 1988, we became a full USAID Mission, by the way.

Q: What was the core of the problem with the North Cameroon Livestock and Agriculture project?

GILBERT: I had a lot coming at me during my time as Acting Director, including the development of a program strategy that I presented in Washington in February 1979 once Jim had arrived and approved it. North Cameroon Livestock was just one of many that we

were trying to get approved or launched into implementation. So I don't recall the details. But I think we ran up against the same problems we been encountering with other livestock-range management projects in the Sahel. Briefly, we realized that it didn't make sense to improve livestock health, improve access to drinking water and improve the herds genetically without also addressing range management issues. But figuring out how to make marginal changes in these systems that would actually add up to a net improvement was an extremely daunting task. The systems were extremely complex and difficult to understand. Without a comprehensive understanding, the potential for unanticipated negative consequences was enormous. And it would be unconscionable and unworkable to make such changes without the informed consent and support of the livestock producing community. I believe these realizations were sweeping the Sahel and they engulfed us at about the time I was getting ready to leave, and that project had about reached the point where all that could usefully done by way of preliminaries had been completed.

Q: Well what other programs...

GILBERT: Well, we had an interesting project called Mandara Mountain Water Development. Someone from another donor agency or an NGO had identified over a hundred sites where construction of small dams could provide household water supplies and support small-scale irrigation plots. It was also determined that the dams could be built on a labor-intensive basis during the dry season. Once that project was launched and going along pretty well, we got the idea of launching a Mandara Mountain rural development or, maybe even, integrated rural development project. But that turned out to be a non-starter.

Q: Do you remember the context of why we got involved with these projects?

GILBERT: I think so. This was during the time when AID launched a campaign to focus its programming on the "poor majority." But in some quarters of AID this got translated into "the poorest of the poor" And the Mandara Mountains were a very hardscrabble part of Northern Cameroon. The mountains were very densely populated and very intensively farmed.

It really is an intriguing part of Cameroon. It is analogous to the mountainous parts of the middle belt of Nigeria, to the Dogon country in Mali in West Africa and to the Nuba Mountains in Sudan. The people of these areas seem to constitute remnant populations that took refuge in the mountains when the nomadic herders and mounted raiders who were the ancestors of the present-day settled, mostly Muslim majority populations (such as Cameroon's Fulani) migrated into the surrounding plains hundreds of years ago. Typically, these mountain dwellers have remained stubbornly pagan. In the Mandara Mountains, as in the Nuba Mountains and the Nigerian middle belt mountains, the populations share many cultural traits. In each of these areas, though, there is a surprising variety of languages. Like the Dogons, the people of the Mandara Mountains are skillful farmers and work like they're killing snakes. They make extensive use of terraces and

cultivate every square centimeter of available land. They have even found ways of integrating livestock into their systems so they could have manure for their crops. But their technology was essentially Neolithic. Owing to this and overwhelming population pressure on the land, theirs was a nearly self-contained subsistence economy.

But how could they be more deserving? I'm sure that I was among those to whom it seemed that, given their poverty and the Agency's interest in integrated rural development, developing a Mandara Mountains Area Development project on the base of the Water Resources project was the obvious thing to do –a “no brainer” in today's vernacular. Well, it turned out to be a “no brainer” in another sense.

As part of the design process we needed an agricultural assessment to determine the scope for increasing agricultural incomes and launching other economic activities as part of such a project. We turned to MSU for this task because we all had high respect for them, and there was a contractual mechanism that offered ready access. What happened next was rare indeed. Very seldom do assessments recommend against the thing in question, but that's what happened in this case. They said, in effect, that it was good of us to want to help these people, but our idea wouldn't work. The technology that would allow them to support a larger population or to raise the level of living on the available resource base simply didn't exist. The main hope for the people of this area was to increase their access to basic education and skills training so their young people could find livelihoods in the larger economy and, thereby, begin to integrate the Mandara community into the larger society.

The integration and the outflow of young people part was, no doubt, music to the ears of our counterparts because this is what they had been hoping for when they encouraged us to get involved in the Mandara Mountains. We had gradually become aware of this sentiment and were wary of it because we felt they had impure motives: to Islamize and otherwise to bring that population into a more normal (read dependent) relationship with the northern power structure. The recommendation to educate and train the potential migrants may have been less welcome; we understood that the northern power structure wanted the Mandara Mountains to supply labor to commercial farms owned by the “Al Hajjis,” i.e. the powerful merchant class who were a major force in the economic and political life of the country. We knew it was thorn in the side these folks and the authorities that the people of the Mandara Mountains retained their pagan folkways, were neither Muslim nor Christian, and managed to eke out an adequate livelihood without significant reliance on the larger economy of Northern Cameroon.

Q: Did we have a program there?

GILBERT: The Mandara Water Resources project went ahead but I don't think we built as many dams as initially thought possible. There was also a small NGO grant for construction of hand-dug wells in parts of the Mandara Mountains where aquifers were close to the surface. We also financed a project called Training for Young Farm Families that was implemented by a Swiss NGO and partially served the Mandara area as well as

other sections of Northern Cameroon. But there was no systematic programmatic response to the MSU findings that I know of.

Q: CARE was working there at one point? I remember visiting a well pump that they provided.

GILBERT: Yes. I don't remember much about that.

Q: It was pretty small.

GILBERT: We were involved in professional-level agriculture education at the National Advanced School of Agriculture a few miles outside Yaounde.

Q: This was a university?

GILBERT: Well, as I recall, it was part of the university system but mostly provided sub-degree-level training. Later on we undertook the intellectual spadework for a University Center for Agriculture Education at Dschang (in the northern part of South West Cameroon). We also had a project with the agriculture and livestock part of the national research structure called ONAREST. That project involved providing improved breeding stock to small mixed farmers in North West Cameroon. Our involvement in seed multiplication led to the establishment of a National Cereals Research and Extension project toward the end of my time in Cameroon.

The biggest project we had was Trans-Cameroon Railway Phase III for realignment of the track between Douala and Yaounde. That project was in the preliminary discussion stage when I arrived in 1976. To my initial consternation John Koehring asked me to serve as project manager for Transcam III while continuing to carry my Deputy Responsibilities. I was right to be concerned about the workload implications, but it turned out to be one of the most rewarding aspects of my Cameroon sojourn.

Jim Hradsky of REDSO was responsible for hands-on capital project development work. That turned out to be quite complex. It involved engineering, economics, social soundness and environmental studies, which meant not only that he was frequently in Yaounde, but also that all sorts of other interesting people were continually coming and going as well. He did an excellent job. Moreover, it was a multi-donor project so that I had to work quite closely with a wide array of the higher-ups in donor missions and embassies as well as in the concerned parts of the Government, particularly the OCFT, which was the independent authority responsible for planning and managing the development, as opposed to the operation, of the railway. Overall coordination on the donor side was the responsibility of the European Community Delegation, and a member of the Delegation served as Technical Controller for the project. I was also the point man for dealing with some difficult issues concerning the transparency and fairness of the procurement arrangements for the various aspects of the project. This was an interesting problem because the European donors as a group were inclined to be cavalier about these

issues. As luck would have it, they came to a head while I was Acting Director for the better part of a year.

Q: What was the purpose of the project?

GILBERT: There were several bottlenecks between Douala and Yaounde and maybe some to the north too. The idea was to straighten the track alignment, put in additional sidings and install better signaling and switching equipment so as to make it possible for the trains to go at a higher average speed and move more freight.

The OCFT was headed by one of the most efficient and likeable people I ever met, Jacques Houdet. I noticed once that he wore the red lapel pin of the Legion d'Honneur and asked him how he earned it. He said in French, "Monsieur Gilbert, you don't have to do anything to earn it, but you have to do it for a long time." The pressures of that job and, probably, some personal grief probably caused his death of a heart attack while I was out of the country on leave in 1978 or 1979.

Q: But the project was approved?

GILBERT: Yes, and considerable progress was made on implementation before I left in 1980. It had to be signed off on by the Director of REDSO/Abidjan as well as John Koehring. Hradsky and I realized that if we hoped to get the project approved on a timely basis, we had to maintain control of the documentation process ourselves rather than let it come under the control of REDSO. The danger was that it would have been difficult to prevent REDSO reviews and wrangling over drafts that were necessarily imperfect, but that we knew how to fix. We wanted to resolve the issues we understood to our own satisfaction in hope that REDSO's eventual review would mainly focus on any issues that we didn't know what to do about. Put another way, we didn't want them snatching at issues that we were still working on directly with various design team members and with OCFT. So I arranged to give Hradsky purchase orders so that he could get the paper typed outside of REDSO and its paper flows. That tactic worked. Once we had resolved all the issues that we could see to the best of our ability, we simply sent the final package to REDSO for its concurrence, and the project was approved in a fairly timely fashion.

Q: Well, we will come back to that. This was a multi-donor project? Who else was involved?

GILBERT: It was a multi-donor project. The French, the European Community and, I believe, the German international development lending arm (KfW). The construction contract went to an Italian firm called IMPREGILO that had done previous work for TransCam.

Q: What was the U.S. part of this?

GILBERT: Good question. We couldn't supply the operating equipment because of the incompatibility of U.S. and European specs. I'm trying to remember the elements that we picked up. The project was divided up into separate bid packages for various donors' financing because most donor-financed procurement was tied. I'm having trouble remembering.

Q: I believe it was steel track, steel rails, maybe other things?

GILBERT: You're right. Steel rail was, I believe, the most important part of the U.S.-financed package. I think we may also have financed some of the construction machinery – such as bulldozers and earth moving equipment – that were needed by IMPREGILO. It was great fun to be associated with a project that progressed and contributed in such a tangible way. It was also pleasant to visit the worksites, sometimes by special train, to inspect progress and enjoy quite good meals at the IMPREGILO camp. I imagine one would have to write a memo to the IG now if we did that. Now that I think about it, we were probably suborned on these occasions!

Q: But I guess it was finished after you left?

GILBERT: Well, it went forward like clockwork compared to so many of our efforts. I remember attending the dedication of the realigned sections including some new depots, staff housing, signaling equipment, switches and sidings. However, the final reporting and financial closeout may still have been underway when I left.

Q: Was it your impression that it was a successful project? It was often hard to tell I guess, until later.

GILBERT: I think it was a successful project. I think it met an important need. The country had very few paved roads running in any direction, but most strikingly only a portion of the road between Douala and Yaounde was paved and the first stretch of paved road going north from Yaounde began at the Ngaoundere railhead and went through Garoua and Maroua to the Chadian border. So the rail line was the backbone of not just the transport net but also of the economy of eastern Cameroon, which was the bulk of the country. The improvements were selective and carefully designed to enhance the efficiency of the system. Engineering and economic studies bore this out. It also served Chad since it depended on the rail line for most of its imports and the evacuation of its exports. As I recall the project came in pretty much at cost and on schedule.

The other major project that I recall from those days was one that grew out of some health care training activities that we had with the Medical School (CUSS) and the Ministry of Health. We had a Harvard University team working at CUSS and at the University Hospital during the whole four years I was there. I believe that they and a group who were working on in-service training of Ministry primary health workers both managed to introduce some training in the provision of family planning services. The new project was called Medical System for Cameroon (MEDCAM). There was a Title XII-type collaborative design arrangement with a group called MEDEX that was associated with

one of the top Medical Schools in the U.S. As I recall they had made a name for themselves in establishing decentralized community-level primary health care structures relying mainly on nurses and midwives backstopped by physicians and higher-level health facilities. MEDEX sent out a quite capable and hardworking young MD/MPH to work on a technical level with the Cameroon Ministry of Health and CUSS. Among other things, it involved setting up something called Pro-Pharmacies, which would be community-controlled, would stock only basic drugs, would procure independently from private wholesalers rather than depend on the Government Central Pharmacy and would be financially sustained by the community.

This concept had revolutionary implications. Nurses and midwives were already providing most medical services at the village level as best they could on an informal basis. But the idea of making sure they had the requisite training and official sanction for their performance of these services ruffled feathers among many Ministry of Health doctors. Also not depending on the totally nontransparent and quite inefficient Central Pharmacy posed problems whose exact nature no one seemed able to clearly explain. There was also the need to plan the renovation and equipping of health posts and health centers and the training of nurses, midwives and pharmacy assistants needed for phased expansion of the system. I can't remember for sure, but I'm pretty sure that we were planning to start with pilot areas. So we were working both on Ministry of Health-level primary health management and planning issues and on district and village-level delivery-of-services-and-medicine issues. It was necessary that USAID Cameroon participate in this process since we were unprepared to give MEDEX carte blanche which they, in any case, did not want.

I was asked to coordinate the common effort that involved MEDEX, the USAID Health Division and the Project Development Office. Sometimes these parties' points of view diverged sharply. Thus, I was continuously engaged in resolving issues that arose among the AID parties while managing the U.S. side of a dialogue with the Ministry of Health. We needed to consult the Ministry of Health but avoid letting this degenerate into separate dialogues or, worse yet, negotiations with each U.S. party. The Government had designated Dr. Atangana, the senior technical person in the Ministry of Health, to coordinate this work with us. Leading our discussions with him in French was a key part of my responsibilities.

I think most of those who were involved in this felt that, though frustrating at times, this was a very worthwhile effort. I would even say it was exhilarating in that we were actually working daily in hands on collaboration with senior, technically competent Cameroonians frankly discussing real issues and opportunities and arriving at agreement on the substance of a far-reaching and workable project. It was so wonderful that it turned out to not be true. The project got approved, but the Cameroonians never signed the project agreement.

It was a big project, probably \$30-40 million in grants and loans over five or six years. The loan part would have covered the construction and commodities elements. The loan

element required an additional step or two in the review and approval of the signature package on the Cameroonian side. That slowed things down, but it doesn't seem to explain the Cameroonians' failure to sign.

My personal view is that it broke down for reasons similar to those that caused a planned Ghana Medical School project to abort in the mid-1960s. A consortium of U.S. medical schools had collaborated in the planning of a medical school and in the design of an AID-financed project to provide a large technical assistance team to help establish and run it. The Ghanaians rejected the project. The Ghanaians went ahead and set up a medical school on their own. Afterwards the leaders who accomplished that freely admitted that they did so because it became clear that they would not be masters in their own house if the planned technical assistance team materialized.

MEDCAM involved a pretty large – say, six or eight person - project technical team, but I think the main problem for the Cameroonians was that the agreement addressed all the potential problems so thoroughly that it was viewed as invasive by important vested interests in the Ministry. As I recall, the Cameroonians prevailed on us to allow the Central Pharmacy to be the conduit and custodian of the supplies for the Pro-Pharmacies but that we insisted on and got provisions in the agreement that required Pro-Pharmacy supplies to be procured, stored and distributed under a special transparent management structure which amounted to a proto-reform of the wider Central Pharmacy management system. The Central Pharmacy was widely considered to be corrupt and certainly maintained a very cozy arrangement with French pharmaceutical companies from which it procured supplies.

Q: Were you there at the time...or was it after you left?

GILBERT: I was there while most of the process preparatory to the signing was underway, but I left a couple of days before the end of the fiscal year. As I recall, we had planned to sign while I was still there, but the ceremony had to be canceled at the last minute because the Cameroonians said they couldn't complete all the approvals required on their side for the loan element of the project. I think that led to a quick decision to defer the loan element and rejigger the project agreement to provide for the grant element but to include language looking forward to loan, other donor or Cameroonian funding of the construction and certain commodities. A new signing was scheduled early on the last day of the fiscal year so that Washington would have all day to deal with the problem if it didn't work out.

To understand why we would still be uncertain about the second signing ceremony, you have to understand the process for approving a new project agreement on the Cameroonian side. Once we reached agreement with the substantive ministry, the package would go to the Ministry of Economy and Planning. When they were satisfied, it would go to the Prime Minister's Office and from there to the Presidency before going back to the Ministry of Economy and Planning. This process could take a long time. I should have mentioned above under the heading of "What was different" that this process

was totally opaque and that our counterparts scrupulously respected that opacity. I would be fascinated to know what penalty they must have feared if they were indiscreet. So once the agreement was revised – despite the shortness of time and even though we had some vague assurances that they meant to move quickly - we had no way of really knowing the extent of the review it would undergo.

Q: Where was the Ministry of Health in this?

GILBERT: Well, we had gotten their nod before we sent it to the Ministry of Economy and Planning. Also, I forgot to mention that Economy and Planning would also have checked formally with the Ministry of Health – and some other ministries - before sending the package to the Prime Minister's Office.

Anyway, John Woods went over for the second signing and was told that it would have to be deferred again. John reminded them that there was no way of assuring that the funds could again be made available in the next fiscal year. But there was nothing our counterparts in the Ministry of Economy and Planning could do. I'm not sure whether Ron Levin had arrived yet.

Q: He was there then.

GILBERT: I bet he loved that.

Q: I can supply a footnote here because I was on the other end in Washington at the time.

GILBERT: I would like to hear it.

Q: I remember trying to hold onto five million dollars and sending messages out asking when are you going to obligate because we had to move the money somewhere else because, with the end of the fiscal year, we would have lost the money, and there were other people who wanted this health money. And so we kept holding on to it and holding on to it while sending messages to find out if you would be able to commit it. And then being told at the last minute...

GILBERT: I can imagine the frustration. What did you ever do with the five million?

Q: We transferred them to some other program. I don't remember which. There were other candidates lined up, but we really wanted to see MEDCAM go forward. This was a very important project.

GILBERT: And I think it was a terrific project. I had the feeling that the guys we were dealing with in the Ministry of Health had genuinely taken ownership of the project. Dr. Atangana was the equivalent of a Secretary General in the Ministry of Health. And the other technical members of his team were pretty high quality people. On the other hand, the minister at that time was a politician who seemed ... well, primitive, even feral. When

you walked into his presence you had the feeling that you were almost in danger. I mean, the guy just gave off the most god-awful, nasty vibrations. Nobody had a good word to say about him. He represented some traditional power group in the country and, no doubt, owed his position to that fact.

Q: Was he hostile to outsiders or Americans?

GILBERT: I don't think it was a matter of feelings. I think the concerns were more material.

I think we had the feeling that it was a waste of time for us to attempt to handle him. That was Dr. Atangana's role and we had every reason to believe that he was briefing the Minister from time to time – at least it was apparent that he was taking occasional cues from someone on the Cameroonian side. If he wasn't going to the Minister, the only other guess would be that he was being guided by his technical colleagues and that they hoped that by maintaining a strong consensus they could get the Minister to go along. Ideally he was doing both. If Atangana was relying on a consensus among the senior technical people to carry the project forward, the Minister may well have felt that he had to appear to go along formally even if he opposed it. I'm sure there were ways he could kill it behind the scenes when it was under review in the Prime Minister's office or the Presidency.

A few years later, when transiting the Abidjan airport, I bumped into the Cameroonian named Vessa Njoya, who had been the Secretary General of the Ministry of Economy and Planning. He and I had become quite friendly. I asked him to tell me what happened, hoping that he could be frank now that he had left that job. He sort of “crossed his heart and hoped to die” and pledged that he never understood what happened either. That may or may not have been true, but I can imagine that it might be. A Secretary General is roughly equivalent to a Permanent Secretary – the highest civil service position. But there was less of a dividing line between the political and the civil service in Cameroon. Many ministers had been civil servants earlier. But that does not necessarily mean that civil servants were political so much as that development sector Ministers were most often technocrats and largely not privy to the inner workings and political calculations of the Prime Minister's Office and the Presidency.

Q: So what is your own conclusion about why? Because this is an interesting phenomenon.

GILBERT: Well, the fact that we never got the least whiff of a coherent explanation of the Government's unwillingness to accept the project makes me think that the real explanation was unacceptable. They never offered issues that they wanted us to deal with because they didn't want them fixed – they wanted the project to go away. Also, if they had raised the issue that I think bothered them the most – which was the project's involvement with the Central Pharmacy – that would have tipped their hand.

There may be some lessons to draw from this. One reason I was asked to coordinate the design process was that two of three USAID Cameroon health staff (apart from their boss who supported it) were highly skeptical of the project and tended to drag their feet when asked to help with the design. And they kept telling us that the thrust of the project was just too contrary to the Ministry of Health's ways of doing things. The Health Division Chief just couldn't get their active cooperation. Ray Rifenberg, the Project Development Officer, and I managed to secure a level of teamwork with the other Health Division staffer that allowed us to move forward with the MEDEX representative to complete the design of the project. However, since the reluctant, foot-dragging health staff members were correct in their assessment, it turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory. I conclude that – even though they couldn't support their argument very well - these guys' gut feeling turned out to be valid. So the lesson I took from this experience was that when you are in a position of authority you can win arguments that you ought to lose, and one needs to guard against that.

Q: What was their principal objection to it?

GILBERT: Well, basically that it was just politically unrealistic.

Q: Why was that? What was about it that was unrealistic?

GILBERT: I think their basic point was that it would disrupt financial flows from corruption and, otherwise, upset too many vested interests.

Q: Okay. I am with you.

GILBERT: Another lesson was that one needs to be careful to not design projects that are too good. Maybe we were trying to do too much. Maybe we should have taken a more gradualist approach to our agenda. Then we might have gotten in the door and been able to learn how things really work, including "who's naughty and nice". Then we could have augmented the project to address realistically a fuller agenda.

Q: A more incremental approach?

GILBERT: Right.

Q: That is interesting. I don't recall any first hand knowledge but my recollection is that it overwhelmed them in a sense. There may have been all these vested interests and they were probably a very significant factor but it was too large an effort to be scaled therefore there was fear that it would dominate the situation so much that...

GILBERT: That is similar to the Ghana med school experience. The Cameroonians, a lot of them, may have just concluded that they wouldn't be the masters of their own house anymore.

Q: And that incremental approach which is basically slower and doesn't commit large funds would have been wiser.

GILBERT: Yes. One problem was that the nay-saying staff members were quite junior and not particularly known for their wisdom. So their mutterings sounded like negativism and slander. Another was that the MEDEX concept was inherently grandiose and not susceptible to incrementalism. To take an incremental approach would have required telling MEDEX and the Cameroonians that we wanted to cancel the collaborative design of the project. We would have had an awkward time trying to explain to MEDEX, the Cameroonians and AID Washington why we decided to do that. The naysaying didn't start (at least not to my knowledge) until MEDEX was on the scene and at work. Also, if we had gone ahead on a smaller scale without addressing the issue of the Central Pharmacy, I'm pretty sure that, within three years, we would have found ourselves wondering why the project concept was not being realized even though we had spent so much money constructing and equipping various facilities and on training staff.

Q: Well, let's pause there.

GILBERT: I remember something else about Cameroon that might be worth discussing. As in other countries we looked for projects that seemed to make sense in terms of the guidance of the day concerning AID priorities. But as far as I can recall we never developed a project without the active encouragement of a Cameroonian agency and, at least, the concurrence of the Ministry of Economy and Planning. However, we quite often got word from Washington that people in the State Department or some visiting Cameroonian had intimated that we were not being responsive to Cameroonian priorities. I don't believe these comments ever came from representatives of Economy and Planning. Instead they came from people who wanted us to finance some activity that would be far outside the AID programming parameters of the time. But when Goler Butcher paid us a visit she apparently remembered this and used a session with the Minister of Economy and Plan to ask him about our responsiveness to their priorities.

Q: She was Assistant Administrator, wasn't she?

GILBERT: Yes. She was the Assistant Administrator for Africa. Once I could see where she was heading with her questioning, it made me quite uneasy. Certainly it was true at one level that we were not particularly responsive to their priorities. They might have preferred to have us building new ministry office buildings maybe or doing all sorts of things that we wouldn't find consistent with our precepts.

Q: You mean the Cameroon government would not...

GILBERT: If they just gave us a list of what they really wanted us to do it probably wouldn't have been very resonant with AID's precepts at the time.

Q: Right.

GILBERT: Anyway, Goler asked her question, no doubt mentioning – among projects like MedCam, North Cam Livestock, Mandara Water Resources - some fairly obscure things like an NGO project in the north. After brief reflection, the Minister said, "Well, yes, everything you are doing has a place in our national priorities and as long as other donors are doing the other things on that list and we have enough donors collaborating effectively, our essential needs will be addressed. I thought it was an astute answer. Without giving a quotable quote he was saying, in effect, what you are doing is defensible and useful but not really as responsive as it might be. I think they would rather have had us more involved in infrastructure and industrial development than in the areas smacking of social engineering that attracted our interest. On the other hand, I don't think I remember their ever making a formal request for projects that we couldn't support. They had a very heads up embassy in Washington that tracked aid matters closely. This was something that John Koehring encouraged. He always stopped by and briefed them when he was in Washington.

Q: Were you involved in projects of other countries?

Central African Empire (CAE)

GILBERT: I was involved in the projects we had in the Central African Empire (CAE) and Gabon. The main project that I recall really getting underway in CAE, apart from a very large Ambassador's Special Self Help Fund, was Ouaham Province Rural Health. We had other projects on the drawing boards for a time, but our work in the CAE usually proceeded, if at all, in a pretty halting fashion. When I arrived there in 1976, Jean Bedel Bokassa was president. And then, within a few months, he made himself emperor. He was emperor until late 1979 when he was deposed in the somewhat prolonged aftermath of a furor over his role in a massacre of civilians, including school children.

Strange and shocking things happened in the CAE on a regular basis. Once a British journalist named something like Goldsmith, who had been admitted to an audience with the Emperor, said something that displeased him or was remembered by the Emperor to have said something unflattering earlier. So the emperor whacked him a few times with the scepter or mace that he carried as a symbol of his authority and threw him in the poky. There he stayed for quite a number of weeks while the British, the French, the European Community and the U.S., among others, made repeated demarches to the Emperor. The Emperor finally released him out of benevolent concern for his delicate health, as I recall. As you can imagine, such developments caused AID and other donors to pause and reflect. Even under the best of circumstances things went slowly and uncertainly in that country.

Q: Did we stop aid at that point?

GILBERT: And, yes, sometimes we would freeze aid. Abby Fessenden came out in 1978 or thereabouts. She was assigned to CAE as resident program officer because it was just

too hard for us to do the necessary from Yaounde or to have sufficient coverage by staff on temporary duty (TDY) there. And, even though one could lodge and dine in comfort in Bangui, these TDYs were trying.

But Abby never took up her assignment. Shortly after she arrived in Yaounde for consultations en route to Bangui, something weird happened and caused AID Washington to instruct her to remain in Yaounde until matters settled down. Well, things didn't improve for a long time. So her assignment was frozen, and she made herself very useful in Yaounde. When her assignment was canceled due to continuing problems in CAE, she was absorbed into our structure in Yaounde. In that capacity she covered CAE, making several TDYs while also helping with USAID Cameroon agriculture sector programming.

But the Ouaham project was designed and approved before Abby got there, and I had some dealings with it. It was centered in Bossangoa, about two hundred miles north of Bangui. It involved strengthening primary health care services provided through health centers and health posts, including some construction and lots of staff training. Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) were to help by overseeing improvements to health facilities and, perhaps, conducting some health education work at schools. This was the first project I ever saw that involved close cooperation with the Peace Corps. It was a rocky owing in part to the PCVs.

The problem occurred because of the difficulty of getting the various components of the project to come on stream at the same time. The PCVs arrived some time before the earliest of two planned AID technicians, one a Health Education Specialist and the other a Public Health Physician. The former arrived first. When the PCVs arrived someone from USAID Cameroon and Karen Woodbury, the CAE Peace Corps Director, agreed that the PCVs would receive some training and a certain amount of money so they could get started with certain basic tasks envisioned in the project plan. I think one activity was latrine construction and another may have been teaching of basic environmental hygiene to school kids.

Well, when the Health Educator arrived he had a pretty complete understanding of the full technical thrust of the AID project. Meanwhile, the PCVs had been at work for some time. Notwithstanding their rather narrow mandate, they had formed their own ideas of what the project should be about, and these were not particularly consistent with the Health Educator's ideas or the project design. Of course the PCVs (this being the late 1970s an all) didn't particularly see why they should listen to this guy who was a newcomer, was over thirty and even had, gasp, a certain amount of gray hair! There was kind of a Mexican stand off and some turmoil during which I don't recall the Peace Corps Office in Bangui being very helpful. But the Health Educator (I believe his name was Jack Finlay) listened to and reasoned with the PCVs, gradually established a working consensus with them and was able to get them working along lines generally consistent with the original project plan. He and they had rightly come to appreciate that some of the priorities and activities in the plan needed to be adjusted. One of these was that school

latrines were a waste of money because the kids couldn't be persuaded to use them owing to some cultural thing, perhaps a taboo.

Just when things were starting to get moving again, the Public Health Physician, who of course had to be the Team Leader, arrived on the scene. When he found that the PCVs and Jack were moving forward without him and not doing everything completely in accordance with his preconceptions, he went off the deep end, Captain Queeg style. He was an internist from a major urban hospital (with public health experience and credentials) who had decided to abandon the professional fast track for humanitarian reasons. Rather than reason and cajole and maybe even concede a point here and there to Jack and the PCVs, he rigidly stood on his authority and began ordering everyone who disagreed with him off the project. Our partners in the CAE Ministry of Health were totally flummoxed, and AID was looking terrible. We tried to get the Team Leader to loosen up and enter into a give-and-take-dialogue, but we just got longer and shriller messages back in answer to each of ours. Finally, our Health Officer and I (as Acting Director during most of 1968) went to Bangui together to assess the situation. It became clear to us, and the concerned CAE health officials, that we could have him and no one else (a chief and no Indians) or we could rely on Findlay and the PCVs to accomplish much of what we had planned. So we took that course. It wasn't pleasant. The Team Leader had something of a messiah complex and saw our action as analogous to a couple of pettifogging bureaucrats presuming to go to Lambaréné to fire Albert Schweitzer.

A lesson I drew from this experience was that a critical mass of technical team members, or at least the Team Leader, needs to arrive first on the job. Failing this, that any lower level team members must be prevented from getting too far out in front. In particular, if you are going to do a project with the Peace Corps, make sure the AID project framework gets put in place before Peace Corps volunteers show up.

The other significant project in CAE concerned drilling wells as well as installing and repairing pumps. It was a really nice project, conceived, I believe, by John Koehring. We did it on kind of a pick-up or sandlot basis. After one of the periodic evacuations of PCVs due to political ructions in Chad, we sounded out key members of a well drilling team and found that they would be interested in doing the same thing on a contract basis. So we contracted with them and also bought two well drilling rigs; pipes, pumps and pump spare parts; and camping equipment. Something like a hundred sites had been identified where new wells were needed or where some kind of rehabilitation was called for. I think there were about five or six guys on a team and a few others who operated a logistics base and office. These guys loved their work and were happy to spend weeks on end at their worksites in the bush. There was supposed to be a committee and a well attendant in each village responsible for seeing that people paid for the upkeep of the pumps, that the pumps weren't damaged (kids liked to swing on the handles, etc.) and that maintenance was carried out regularly. I think there were a few counterpart Central Africans that worked on the project with them, but developing institutional capacity in the government to continue the work was the weak spot in the project. On the other hand, donors' talking about sustainability in the CAE was like Linus' talking about the Great Pumpkin. The

government was too poor to sustain much of anything so sustainability had to be redefined as applying to the community level. Sometimes sustainability of a sort was achieved by donors' picking up where one another left off in various sub-sectors and geographic areas.

I think most of us departed for our TDYs in Bangui with a sense of adventure, if not trepidation. One thing that happened from time to time, but all of us hoped to avoid, was that the Emperor would hear about some visitor and, if his curiosity was pricked, convoke him or her. Most of the time it was just an interesting experience, but sometimes it could take an unhappy turn. I mentioned earlier the case of the British reporter, Goldsmith. Another example concerned the American DCM. He once got convoked and was effectively shanghaied for a couple of days. In the midst of an audience with the Emperor, it was suddenly decided that "everyone" would hie off to a hunting reserve in the eastern part of the country. According to the rigid protocol in the emperor's court, there was no departing the exalted presence without being excused. Rather than being excused, he was "convoked" to go along. I can't vouch for this story, but it was told to me with a straight face, and it was not implausible.

It was difficult to get to Bangui. There was only one flight that departed from Yaounde. That involved going by way of Brazzaville, and its frequency was such that it was impossible to stay in Bangui for less than a week. So most of us went to Bangui on the emperor's champagne flight. The emperor had a personal Caravel that made a twice weekly trip to Douala to pick up supplies for the emperor's court. These usually included at least a pallet of cases of champagne. The plane was partitioned. On one side sat the passengers and on the other side was the freight. But the partition was canvass and you could see all the pallets.

The Cameroon Airlines (CamAir) flight to Douala got in the late morning and the Caravel left at something like 4 PM. One normally made a courtesy call at the U.S. Consulate and then went to lunch at a pleasant little restaurant nearby called *Chez Christophe*. Once when I was sitting there having lunch I noticed a jolly, loudish party of people at the bar, but I didn't think too much of it. Among them was a short, pudgy, blond Frenchman who had kind of a dissipated look about him and, together with the others, seemed to be throwing back a few drinks at the bar. That evening, as we were flying to Bangui on the Emperor's Caravel (converted to a Central African Airways flight for the occasion), we went through some very bumpy weather. I was pretty tense. One reason was that the plane seemed to be overloaded. It had seemed to be straining from the moment it took off. Another thing that worried me was that the two stewardesses, who looked familiar to me, seemed agitated and distraught. What was eating them?!

We obviously made it to Bangui. As we got off, who should I see but the little blond Frenchman wearing a Captain's uniform and walking away with his co-pilot who also looked familiar. This guy and the other members of the flight crew had been drinking in this bar and restaurant only about six or seven hours previously and our flight had lasted at least two hours. I think the stewardesses were a little hung over and feeling both guilt

and fear. I have to grant that it is just possible that some or all had been drinking nonalcoholic beverages, but I am virtually certain that was not the case. And even if they weren't, allowing it to appear that they were drinking was nearly as scandalous as the reality could be.

Before I left Yaounde Bokassa was overthrown and went into exile in Abidjan. The country became the Central African Republic once again. Before we leave the CAR, I would like to add a couple of postscripts. One is that I was struck by how competent and dedicated some of that country's health sector public servants were. They compared favorably with their counterparts in Cameroon technically and I thought that that they deserved a lot of credit for their willingness to serve their country despite all the cards stacked against them during Bokassa's excesses. Their skills and earning power gave them the option of being outside the country earning decent incomes. I had the feeling that the ones that I knew were doing what they could despite a lot of corruption and craziness all round them. With the connivance of the Director of Rural Health (approximate title) we hid the Ouham project vehicles that were kept in Bangui to prevent their being commandeered by higher ups in the Ministry of Health or other ministries. A picaresque novel titled Malaria Dreams is both highly entertaining and accurate in depicting the CAR, including Bangui, as well as Chad, Northern Nigeria and Niger. The man who wrote it obviously had experience in that part of the world.

Q: What programmatic interests did AID have in Gabon?

Gabon

GILBERT: In about 1974 Congress wrote into the AID legislation a grant of five million dollars to the Schweitzer Hospital at Lambarene. I definitely recall making two trips to Lambarene. One was to just go and see if everything was as it should be. Later I was invited to the dedication of a new wing of the hospital that had been put up using AID as well as other donor funds. And so I went down to attend that with Art Tinken, the American Ambassador in Libreville.

Q: What was your impression of the hospital complex there and the situation?

GILBERT: Well, it had been modernized somewhat through improvement of plumbing and the addition of electricity, but was still very simple, rustically colonial and, I suspect, outwardly little changed since Schweitzer's day. Schweitzer's idea had been to make it open and welcoming to the African populations of the surrounding forest region. And some of the things I had read about were still true. Families would come and camp at the hospital. The families continued to feed the patients. I'm sure they did a lot of good, but it was still on a pretty small scale. With hindsight, it ought to have been interesting to health professionals as an appropriate technology application and have been evaluated by them on those terms, but I saw no indication of that. It seemed to draw harsh criticism from one group who saw it as somehow racist because it made no effort to be as antiseptically and technologically apart from its surroundings as their precepts required a hospital to be and

by another group who were wed to the idea that health care should rest on a pyramid of decentralized health posts and health centers topped by hospitals providing the senior professional support to satellite, subordinate facilities and caring for the most difficult cases. But Lambarene didn't fit either precept and probably could not do so owing to the sparseness of the population of that part of Gabon. The country had fewer than a million people and most of those lived in the larger cities and towns. Lambarene is in a really remote part of the country. When one flies to it, you see very few roads and clearings. This characteristic is very striking when you fly over in a single engine aircraft with a pilot who looks to be about 16 as I did the first time I went there.

Q: Were they doing any kind of public health work as opposed to curative?

GILBERT: Not that I could perceive. I think I heard about health education of people that came there for childbirth and that sort of thing. And I seem to recall that they had responded to the current doctrine of the hospital as the hub of a decentralized system to the extent of doing some outreach close to the hospital, but they didn't have a lot of staff and the surrounding region was vast. There was a Swiss medical team there when I visited and there were probably a majority of African nurses, but I don't believe there were any Gabonese doctors. I believe I was told they couldn't recruit Gabonese doctors to work there, and that's completely plausible.

Gabonese capable of doing any work in the modern sector were rare (and rumored to be impossibly lazy). When I was going to Gabon there was a very large Cameroonian immigrant or guest worker population. Libreville was the only place in Africa where I ever saw Europeans doing unskilled manual labor. A Yugoslav construction company carrying out widening of city streets had brought in Yugoslav ditch diggers, and no one I talked to criticized them for it. This reflected not just a labor shortage, but also a kind of a Gulf state-type of phenomenon. Gabonese citizens were in such great demand as partners in, and front men for, foreign-owned businesses that many developed a sense of entitlement to being paid "for their good looks," so to speak.

But even if the Schweitzer Hospital was understandable in all its peculiarity, the U.S. grant was a good example of the kind of silliness that comes of Congressional riders getting tacked onto AID legislation. There was no significant wider impact to our investment. Viewed as a pilot project, the Lambaréné approach would not be applicable except in the highly unique conditions found in Gabon, and I suppose that's why no one proposed evaluating its cost-effectiveness. Moreover, I don't really think that our money was much needed. The nostalgia and mystique of the place was sufficient to guarantee that they would receive "feel good" contributions from Europe adequate to continue their core work.

Equatorial Guinea

Q: And then there is Equatorial Guinea.

GILBERT: Yes.

Q: Were you involved in that?

GILBERT: Do you remember Macias, the dictator who had something like a hundred political opponents executed in a stadium to the strains of “Those Were the Times, My Friend.” a tune from the movie Zorba, the Greek? Well, that was just the tip of the iceberg because tens of thousands of ordinary people died under his rule apart from that. He was overthrown and executed in 1979. State and AID Washington decided that some kind of program was required there and we were asked to send an assessment and planning team to explore options. Our senior Project Development Officer, Ray Riffenberg, had come out of the Latin America Bureau and spoke fluent Spanish. He, as well as members of health and agriculture staffs, carried out the assessment.

Q: This was the first time?

GILBERT: Yes, but I can’t remember what came out of it. Well, maybe I remember something. I think that we probably ran a rather large Ambassador’s Special Self-Help Fund with modified rules that allowed us to spend largish amounts on sub-activities such as, say, \$50,000 to rehabilitate agriculture training school buildings and health posts, etc. I gather Equatorial Guinea was pretty bleak – more so than CAR. And I thought CAR was the most untouched part of Africa that I had ever seen.

Q: How do you describe it?

GILBERT: Well, I can actually only describe Ouham Province. It seemed to have an overwhelmingly subsistence economy. There were villages, but they had little in the way of infrastructure, and I don’t believe Bossangoa had electricity apart from a few open-air bistros that had gasoline- or diesel-powered generators. As in most of the Francophone countries that I knew, there were very few paved roads, but the unpaved roads were pretty well maintained. You could drive between 50 and 60 mph on straight stretches between villages. There was no commercial development. Unlike villages in Ghana, Nigeria or Cameroon, there were no Coca Cola, Fanta or beer signs. The markets mostly sold local food stuffs plus a few tins of sardines, cheap razor blades and, maybe, some flash lights and batteries. Otherwise you had the feeling that you were in a kind of a pristine setting. For example, most people lived in houses with adobe walls and thatched roofs. There were very few schools.

Q: And this is an area where we had what projects?

GILBERT: A health project.

Q: That pretty well covers that assignment. That is very interesting. Well, then you went back to the Sahel Development Program after that.

Assignment as Deputy and Acting Director, USAID/Tanzania - 1983-1986

GILBERT: Yes, but since we talked about that out of sequence so as to consolidate the treatment of my two stints in the Sahel office, we've reached the point where I was assigned to Tanzania in the fall of 1983. I was assigned there as Deputy Director. It was not a happy period in my career because I was thoroughly on the outs with the AA/AFR, and he had been feeding a lot of negative material about me into the executive personnel management network. As a result, he was able to inform me with a note of triumph that I had two options: to be AID Representative in Cape Verde or Deputy Director in Tanzania. I chose Tanzania because I was interested in East Africa and Tanzania, in particular. I doubt that I would have had those options were it not for the fact that the AA/AFR had thoroughly alienated the A/AID and others. But I was really quite bitter as well as physically and psychologically tired as I left AFR/SWA. My bitterness was only slightly assuaged when I learned that my tormentor's own options were so limited that he accepted an assignment as Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea. I believe he remained there for all the remaining years of the Reagan administration.

Within about six weeks of our arrival in Tanzania, the Mission Director, who was Art Handly, was transferred to Cairo as Deputy Director. Soon after he left, we learned that Handly would not be replaced and that I would be holding the fort for the indefinite future as Acting Director. This was because Tanzania was on the verge of falling under the terms of the Brooke Amendment whereby assistance must be suspended when a country has fallen more than a year behind in repaying debts owed to the U.S. Government. I was told that I should move into the Mission Director's residence, an old, charming, colonial house that AID owned and wanted to hang on to.

Q: Was there some political reason why Handly wasn't being replaced?

GILBERT: I believe it was partly meant to downgrade our level of representation and symbolize to the Tanzanians that the aid-relationship with the U.S. was on the down slope. The explicit, pragmatic and valid reason was that, with no early prospect for resumed programming of new assistance, it simply made no sense to maintain a person of Handly's seniority and experience as manager of the Tanzania program.

But before I go on I have to give you some background to what happened during my time in Tanzania. The Reagan State Department nursed a considerable grudge toward the Tanzanian Government. Lurking in the collective memory was a picture of Foreign Minister Salim Salim, then Ambassador to the U.N., jiggling in the aisle at the U.N. General Assembly session that admitted China to the U.N. despite strenuous U.S. opposition. George Bush was U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. at that time. But their sins had continued and multiplied because they disagreed with the U.S. on lots of sensitive cold war issues, they were extremely active and influential within the nonaligned movement and they reputedly had the most effective foreign ministry and diplomatic service in Africa. If the White House' and State's idea of a good African partner was Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, imagine how obnoxious Tanzania's Julius Nyerere had to be to them.

He was a dedicated and obstinate African (non-Marxist) socialist whose policies were driving his own country's economy into the ground, but Tanzania had a reasonable human rights record despite its one-party political system. While there was corruption in Tanzania, no taint of corruption ever touched Nyerere. Tanzania was an active Front Line state in the struggle with the apartheid regime in the Republic of South Africa (RSA). Tanzania harbored representatives, and even military bases, of the African National Congress (ANC), Sam Nujoma's Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and others, including fairly radical South African group whose name included "Pan-African" in it. They maintained cooperative relations with East Germany (getting technical assistance with internal security). They hosted North Korean, Albanian and, I'm pretty sure, Cuban Embassies. Yet they were fiercely independent and completely in control of their government and territory. And the country was largely free of tribalism. As far as I could tell, the only group of any heft in national politics that was viewed with trepidation by the largely detribalized majority was the Chaga who lived around Moshi and on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. The Tanzanians relentlessly opposed and occasionally thwarted U.S. foreign policy on many issues. As far as I could see, they got no credit for responding to Idi Amin's aggression against them by invading Uganda and kicking him out. To me, given the horror with which the U.S. and the West viewed the Amin regime, this showed that as of 1983 the U.S. was making little effort to be unbiased in its approach to Tanzania.

However, during the 1970s Tanzania had been an emphasis country and received very large amounts of U.S. assistance. As AID's concern about economic policy frameworks increased and as the economic toll taken by the Uganda war dramatized that the Tanzanian economy had become nearly inoperative, AID levels began during the early 1980s to decline as AID - in coordination with the World Bank and the IMF - tried to get the Tanzanians to realize that their African Socialist policies were failing and to see the value of abandoning the regime of administered prices and other controls on the economy. Various studies were carried out and discussed with Tanzanian technocrats, especially a man named Simon Mbalini (phonetic spelling), who was, I believe, called something like Chief Economist in the Ministry of Agriculture. For some time the Tanzanians and the donors had been engaged in a kind of dance wherein the Tanzanians paid just enough to stay out of "Brooke status" while talking economic policy reform and seeking debt rescheduling while the donors, for their part, periodically rescheduled debt payments and continued to provide new assistance in smaller and smaller amounts. Meanwhile, the Tanzanians continued to receive large amounts of assistance from the Nordic donors who expressed little concern about the policy framework. When the Tanzanians finally ceased payments, it was viewed within AID as a kind of message that they had no intention of trying to reach an accommodation with the U.S. and the World Bank on economic policy and aid issues. This, no doubt, contributed to the decision to move Art Handly out.

When we arrived, the Ambassador was David Miller. He was frank, but also engaging, outgoing and irrepressibly constructive in his approach to the Tanzanians. He was replaced sometime in 1984 by a very senior career USIA officer who had served as

Counselor of that agency and earned the Reagan Administration's gratitude for his skill in limiting the amount of trouble their appointee landed in as a result of his strange antics. I have never seen an Ambassador take up his duties in such a peevish frame of mind. At our first meeting he let me know, with a meaningful glower, that he and the AID Assistant Administrator for Africa (by then in Spanish language training preparatory to his new role in Equatorial Guinea), with whom I and others had had so much trouble, were personal friends.

By the time he arrived, Tanzania was firmly ineligible to receive further U.S. assistance because they were in "Brooke status."

Q: This meant no new AID funding?

GILBERT: That's right. For some time Tanzania had been slipping in and out of Brooke in the course of the "dance" with the donors that I mentioned earlier. But by late 1983 it had become clear to them that the amount of U.S. assistance that they would get by remaining out of Brooke would not be amount to much unless they also undertook economic policy reforms well beyond what they were prepared to contemplate just then.

Q: This is at the point in time when AID's development policy strategy had moved away from the poor majority and basic needs? What was the environment?

GILBERT: Well, there is a tendency to think that the shift toward renewed concern with economic growth and economic policy frameworks came with the Reagan administration, but I like to remind people that it really started towards the end of the Carter administration. One factor in the shift was the study that Elliot Berg led for the World Bank. The realization that we had been neglecting the important question of whether policy frameworks were adequate to promote development was spreading rapidly before Carter left office, and a movement to increase the number of economists in AID, and to make better use of who remained, was well underway in 1980. It had gathered a great deal of momentum by 1983. For example, the Tanzania Mission had two program economists until Joe Goodman departed a few weeks before I got there.

And I think it would be fair to say that in 1982-83 the U.S. was out in front of the other donors. Definitely that was the case compared to other bilateral donors in Tanzania. And, you know, I couldn't help wondering if that weren't one of the reasons that they allowed themselves to go into Brooke. They may have hoped we would decamp or go silent, thus posing less of a "bad example" to the other donors.

One of the first meetings I remember attending was with Cleopas Msuya, the Finance Minister. He treated us to a discourse that he had obviously perfected on earlier occasions. He traced the intellectual history of Tanzania's development strategies all the way back to independence and made a pretty convincing case that all their major mistakes had resulted from going along with donor ideas and priorities. Neither he nor Mbalini made any pretense at all that the current policies were anything but bankrupt. Both men

took the position that they were working to build a consensus for change, and that the donors needed to be a little more patient and a little less self-righteous. They rightly pointed out that it is not all that easy to climb down once you get way up a tree and out on a branch that is sagging under your weight.

The Tanzanians had some very good people. For instance, Simon Mbalini was an economist who had spent years in the United States and earned a Ph.D. there. He had worked for a firm that traded on one of the commodities exchanges. This guy understood how markets worked and he believed in them. But neither he nor Msuya could act on his own. The challenge they faced was to bring a lot of very stubborn people with strong vested interests in the status quo around to a new policy consensus.

As Chief Program Economist, Joe Goodwin – often working with a consultant named Dick Neuburg - had generated some useful studies dealing with a variety of economic policy issues. These had been circulated among the donors and concerned Tanzanian bodies, including key people like Simon Mbalini. And sometimes his comment would be "Yes, this is close to the mark." At other times, he and others would offer some rather professional criticisms of the data, analysis or the methodology used. Though there was a real policy dialogue at that level, I wouldn't, and didn't then, argue that it was going anywhere much.

Well, once they got firmly into Brooke, our initial focus was on our substantial pipeline. It would carry the remaining projects for two or more years in most cases. Also, we had a certain amount of U.S.-use local currency and a lot of counterpart local currency from earlier PL 480 Title I programs and, possibly, a Commodity Import Program. So we thought we would make some tactical changes – including maximizing the use of local currency - and implement our projects on a revised timetable, hoping in the meanwhile that Tanzania would get out of Brooke and become eligible for new funding.

But then we became aware of a provision in the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) that provided funding to prevent leaving unusable, unfinished investments (i.e., "white elephants") behind when circumstances, including the Brooke Amendment, required closure of AID programs. So with a nod from Washington and help from Satish Shah, who was then a REDSO/ESA project design officer, we prepared amendments to all of our ongoing projects so that the existing pipeline combined with counterpart currency programmed by the GOT and - as necessary - these supplementary funds would see the projects to useful, though earlier-than-scheduled, conclusions. We did this fairly quickly because there was a pretty stringent time limit on the availability of the above mentioned supplementary phase-out funds.

We did this with the initial guidance and full knowledge throughout of Washington. However, we did so under our delegation of authority, which permitted us to approve the amended projects provided we had legal concurrence and followed certain technical guidance from REDSO. We were scrupulous in observing the terms of our delegation. Once the amended project papers were completed, we prepared draft project agreement

amendments and Congressional Notifications (CNs). This was a very complicated and intense process because we also had to work simultaneously with our Tanzanian counterparts on each project and also with the unit that programmed counterpart currencies.

But once we had completed these steps, and - most importantly – learned that the CNs had been cleared by all concerned in AID/W and sent to the Hill, we breathed a sigh of relief and scheduled a signing ceremony. It turned out that, in view of the number of projects involved, the Minister of Finance decided to sign for the GOT. I'm sure I offered to have the Ambassador also sign, but I believe it was decided that I would sign alone. Of course, in the best AID tradition, the signing date was either the last or the next to the last possible day. This was not the end of the fiscal year, but the end of the deadline specified in the FAA for using the supplemental funds.

Late on the night before the signing, I got a call and a NIAC cable to the effect that the Hill had questioned the CN and that hasty negotiations had produced a scaled-back allocation of the supplemental funds considerably below the planned amount.

Accordingly, the amended project agreements that we had sent over for the Government to review were no longer valid. Still we needed to obligate the smaller amount of funds within the deadline. Thank heavens, Washington said they would work on the modalities of the obligation and give us guidance by opening of business. The signing was scheduled for something like 9 AM. The next morning, I couldn't reach anyone at the Ministry of Finance by phone at the normal opening hour. So, after an exceptionally early huddle with my senior colleagues to explain our problem and get them working on how to divide up the smaller amount of funding among our five or six continuing projects, I went over to break the news to the Tanzanians at a little after 8 AM. Brushing past some media folks who were getting ready to cover the event, I found a senior civil servant named Makenya and explained the problem to him. He left me to go and explain it the Minister. Makenya returned with word that he would work with us during the day to arrive at an agreement that he would make sure received the Minister's signature within the necessary timeframe. Walking back to my car with Makenya, we encountered the Minister. I stopped to say how sorry I was for this turn of events, offering to shake hands at the outset. He looked right through me and kept walking. That may have been salutary since Makenya felt terrible about it and may, as a result, have tried a bit harder to be helpful during the remainder of the day. That day we sort of bonded, and I came to appreciate him a great deal. Neither the Minister of Finance nor Mbalini of Agriculture ever met with me or communicated informally with me again. Thanks to excellent work by my colleagues, quick understanding and good cooperation on Makenya's part and excellent support from the legal staffs in REDSO and Washington and the Washington desk, we managed to obligate our supplemental funding. That meant that we would be completing five projects over periods of roughly 30 to 36 months per project using supplemental, pipeline and counterpart funds. It also meant that we accelerated wrap-up of five or six other projects that had been scheduled to run through FY 1985 using previously obligated funds.

Another crisis had to do with the Operating Expenses (OE) budget. Even though the number of our U.S. staff positions had been pared down, we still had substantial U.S. staff and national staff and lots of administrative and logistics expenses. We had a large logistics base in Dar and little had been done to pare it down. Our room for maneuver was limited by the fact that AID owned real estate in Dar and in Arusha, and there were legal requirements governing how we managed such property. For the first few months that I was there, our OE budget seemed sufficient. But the rate of inflation increased, and it became clear that we were headed for trouble. When we asked for an adjustment in our OE level, we got no reply except a lower quarterly allocation than we had anticipated. This was alarming, because we risked being unable to pay our bills. So I personally sent a cable and, getting no response, another and still another. I tried to reach the concerned people on the phone with no success. Then the Controller and the Executive Officer came to me and said they were getting feedback through their channels that we weren't going to get more funding, that I was making "people" angry and that they wanted me to shut up and for us to live with whatever we got — which wasn't likely to be even what we had been led to expect because others wanted it for expanding programs. And anyway, what were we still doing in Tanzania? Didn't we understand that we were expected to disappear?

Just about then, the Tanzanians saved us by devaluing their currency by a substantial amount – something like 40%. After the briefest imaginable sigh of relief, my colleagues and I realized that we would still wind up in trouble unless we soon reached an understanding with AID/W on how we were going to manage the Tanzania program under the new circumstances. We had noticed somewhat belatedly (interestingly, I don't think anyone in Washington or REDSO prompted us on this) that there was actually a section in the Handbooks on what to do when circumstances require a significant scaling back or termination of an AID program. It called for the Mission to prepare a plan for approval by AID/Washington. So I wrote a cable to Washington pointing out, *inter alia*, that we would be doing this and saying when we would submit it. I can't remember for sure, but the *inter alia* part probably included some admonitions to the effect that we needed to reach a stable understanding on what we were expected to do in terms of program and property management, rather than continuing to have revisionist skirmishes over OE and other issues at every step of the way. I was really steamed, and all this garbage – coming on the heels of my experiences with the Sahel Program - was taking a significant emotional toll on me. I was beginning to feel like a fall guy, and I didn't much care what anybody thought about my unhappiness with the way things had been going. We said that we would submit our phase-down plan in early summer of 1984 to be reviewed as part of the Annual Budget Submission process, which for us would be mainly about the OE level.

Q: So, you were being confronted by high inflation rates and your costs were going way up...

GILBERT: High inflation was throwing off the cost estimates on which the OE budget had been based, and, finally, devaluation saved us. Before that, while we were twisting in

the wind, nobody ever gave us serious, workable advice or guidance on how we should deal with the situation we were in. Al Ford was the Desk Officer. Ed Spriggs was the East Africa and Southern Africa Office Director and Brian Kline was the Officer-in-Charge for some other countries, including Tanzania. These guys would talk to us on the phone and try to be helpful, but they couldn't get decisions or directions out of anybody about Tanzania. They agreed that the phase-down plan was the right solution. But I'm sure we never got a cable responding to mine on our intent to do a phase-down plan. I figured that this was all the more reason to plow ahead, and that's what we did.

We had a Population Officer named Spence Silverstein in the Mission. He was waiting to hear about an early transfer given that his projects were among those that we decided not to pursue. Not having much to do, he readily agreed to take on the task of coordinating the phase-down plan. He produced a very respectable product. It involved phasing-down to a minimal level consistent with maintaining an AID presence on the grounds that Tanzania would continue to be eligible to receive food aid and funding for NGO programs in Tanzania. Given that Tanzania suffered from chronic and transitory food insecurity, we felt it made sense to maintain a small office in Dar to oversee food aid and NGO activity. We were also assuming that there had to be a "turnaround" before long and that, when that happened, AID would be required to launch a new program in Tanzania. The administrative management folks in Washington – especially Ann Dotherow and Carol McGraw - were very supportive of us and wanted to avoid premature disposal of AID-owned and choicer leased property. These properties had been rewired, equipped with safe havens and otherwise improved to make them secure and comfortable for American families. Dotherow and McGraw knew from sad previous experience that the Agency would pay dearly in the future for inferior premises when the inevitable reinstatement of an AID presence occurred.

I hand delivered the phase-down plan on schedule when passing through Washington en route to Minnesota for R and R. Among the meetings I had was one with the man who succeeded Ray Love as Senior DAA. After a few pretty stiff pleasantries, I said something like, "Well, I have the phase-down plan, and I'll be delivering it to AFR/ESA unless you wish someone else to coordinate the necessary review." Brian Kline was there with me, and we had agreed that we wanted guidance on that point. And the Senior DAA – whom I had always admired - said, "Fritz, we don't care about this phase-down plan. We don't want to discuss it; we want you to just close everything down out there. When that's done we'll see that you get a good onward assignment." That is almost a verbatim quote.

I think I must have been paranoid enough by then to have half anticipated the possibility of such a reaction because I suddenly heard myself saying that it would be both illegal and irresponsible to do that except on the basis of written instructions from Washington and, "if that's what you want, you need to get yourself another boy." There was a longish silence. Brian looked like he was doing long division in his head. I was livid and so adrenalized I was twitchy. Finally, the Senior DAA said, "Okay, ... all right, we'll review this thing and respond to it."

A couple of weeks later I returned to Washington for the review. Larry Saiers, who, at that point, may have been one of the DAAs, but had yet to become the Senior DAA, chaired it. Our plan was pretty well received. However, we were told that it didn't go far enough. They provisionally accepted our plan for phasing down the U.S. and national staffs as the program declined, but wanted the plan to culminate in phase-out after a brief period when the Executive Officer completed the wind up all AID's legal and administrative affairs. They also assigned Ann Dotherow and Jim McCabe to come out on TDY and participate in putting these changes into the final document. When they came out, they caught a few, mainly property management, issues that had escaped us and improved our document without really changing its thrust or accelerating its timing. If anything, they made the phase-down process a bit more deliberate than we proposed. The final plan was formally approved, and we had no significant trouble after that with OE budget issues. I believe that phase-out was slated to occur at the end of FY 1987.

And so, with a gradually dwindling team of about 14 U.S. direct hires and about 60 nationals, I was there for another two years implementing five projects and the phase-out plan. It was really quite a management challenge. We couldn't allow project implementation to slide because that would cause the other elements of the phase-out to slide as well. Because I had argued against making the plan's final scenario (at the outset, at least) phase-out rather than phase-down, some folks in Washington suspected my commitment to the plan. Our credibility was therefore really, really on the line. But in addition to managing the program, we had major gyrations to go through in the management of our administrative and logistics structure. Because of our strong belief (which turned out to be entirely correct) that a turnaround would prevent AID's departure, we and the pragmatists in Washington agreed that we needed to get rid first of our least desirable leases and retreat last of all to the properties that AID owned. We also were required to give the Embassy the first refusal on properties that we shed. As our projects ended we could get rid of U.S. staff. This, in turn, permitted us to reduce our housing and vehicle pools as well as the related logistics base. As these shrank, we went through six-monthly rounds of national staff reductions.

One of our toughest challenges was to maintain national staff loyalty and motivation. Part of our response was to develop an outplacement program and a system of performance awards to enhance the severance package that good employees could expect on departure. Another part was to be scrupulous in eliminating functions rather than targeting individuals for reduction. We classified all of our jobs and employees, and, within each job classification and grade, we dismissed the lower grade and last hired employees first.

It was not a lot of fun but I learned a lot. The program was varied and interesting. Our counterparts were interesting and serious people, except for one really foul ball in the Ministry of Health. And, best of all, I got to know Tanzania. Oh, and I almost forgot! We wound up being involved in a multi-donor policy dialogue with the Tanzanians that culminated in a turnaround a few months after I left in May 1986.

Q: What was the Embassy doing in all this? What was their position?

GILBERT: Well, as you recall, I did not have a warm, fuzzy relationship with the Assistant Administrator for Africa who was a personal friend of the Ambassador who replaced David Miller.

Q: The new Ambassador's friend was the successor of Goler Butcher.

GILBERT: That's right. Now, on looking back, it seems to me that the arrival of the new Ambassador in the summer of 1984 either marked or coincided with a significant hardening of the U.S. attitude toward Tanzania. You might say he was ideally cast for the role of U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania at that particular moment, although I'm not entirely sure that the U.S. posture was meant to be as negative as he seemed inclined to make it. He was a very complex person. At the outset, though somewhat less so later, he and his wife (a Foreign Service Officer on leave without pay) seemed not to like Tanzania and to be uncomfortable with Tanzanians. Someone who wanted to soften my impression of him told me that he had hoped for an Ambassadorship to Hungary since he spoke the language fluently and that he desperately hoped that he would be rewarded with such an assignment if he did well in Tanzania. He seemed personally offended by Tanzania's special brand of African socialism, which had many of the negatives of Soviet Bloc Communism - including the corrupt, inept, cynical and hypocritical apparatchiks of the sole legal party - but not the human rights abuses. Enthusiastic about the negatives in the USAID relationship with Tanzania, he seemed always on the lookout for ways of rendering our posture and actions more unfavorable and unpalatable than necessary. He found various ways to convey that he viewed my commitment to implementing our programs and the phase-out plan according to the agreed timetable as thinly disguised disloyalty to him and the lofty principles underlying the Reagan State Department's stance toward Tanzania. A phrase that appeared in one of my annual evaluation reports went something like "Mr. Gilbert's loyalty to his programs impairs his effectiveness as a member of the country team." My evaluations during his tenure conveyed a tone of icy reserve (as if they decided not to mention that I was a child molester).

Predictably, he and I came into early conflict because he wasted little time in seeking ways to hasten the phase-out of the AID program and reduce our presence. When I foolishly talked about signs that the Tanzanians would launch economic policy reforms that could eventually lead to an IMF package and that this, in turn, would enable them to clear their arrears, make them eligible for a Paris Club debt rescheduling, it apparently confirmed his view that I needed to be watched for signs of backsliding on the phase-out plan. That was bad enough, but it got worse because he began to look for ways of accelerating phase-out. When I told him that would violate amended project agreements and that were the foundation of the phase-out plan, I soon got word that he was complaining in Washington that I was insubordinate. When he took it into his head that he would help us with the phase-out by making AID-owned property available to other diplomatic missions. I explained to him that this was expressly contrary to the phase-out plan. When I learned indirectly that he had started talking about selling some properties

that AID owned in Arusha, I arranged within AID to have management responsibility for them transferred to REDSO in Nairobi.

When we were putting together the human resources side of the phase-out plan, the Ambassador and DCM (also from the Europe Bureau and with no experience in Africa), were very suspicious and insisted on editing the communications we issued to our own staff so that we wouldn't "give away the store." The idea that we would take pains to maintain the loyalty and cooperation of the national staff just seemed to baffle and offend them.

Later on when there was a food security emergency following on poor harvests in Singida, Shinyanga, Dodoma and Tabora Regions, I initially encountered resistance to our efforts to survey the situation and organize a modest but essential response through Catholic Relief Services. They were suspicious that we were trying to do with food aid what we couldn't do with Development Assistance funds. Their attitude noticeably changed when they realized that part of the problem we faced was that regional officials were not reporting on the problem. Therefore, the Central Government was denying its existence and resisting our efforts to document it. If I, whom they suspected of being overly solicitous of the Tanzanians, was willing to irritate the GOT, maybe there really was a compelling need.

These skirmishes were unpleasant, but they had two salutary effects. One is that higher ups in Washington began to appreciate what I was up against and became more supportive. My relationship with the Ambassador became more functional (though still not good) as he began to perceive that, even if I was a total nobody in the upper circles of the Reagan administration and totally uninterested in changing that, I was neither totally under his control nor inclined to take his machinations lying down. I also got along very well with most of the other elements of the U.S. Mission. USAID Tanzania was a remarkably effective and harmonious organization with surprisingly good morale. These assertions could not be made about the Ambassador and DCM or about the Embassy. Toward mid-1985 I began to sense a grudging and wary respect – even occasional efforts to "make nice" and to work on promoting post morale.

Q: Go on.

GILBERT: So, we continued to implement the phase-out plan. We continued to participate in donor coordination meetings and activities organized by the World Bank Resident Representative, Ron Fennell. As is often the case with a resident USAID Mission, we were much sought out by staff of other donor institutions who wanted the "local" knowledge and perspective that our people could provide concerning issues that they were seized with. I think it was early or mid-1985 that the donors found themselves in a policy dialogue with the Tanzanians. We found ourselves supporting it mainly with the analytical work that Joe Goodwin and Dick Neuburg had done, but also with modest updates of information and analysis that we were able to furnish. We still had one Program Economist and a number of other staff with good analytical skills and in-depth

knowledge of the sectors for which they were responsible: agriculture, livestock, education, public administration, public health and population as well as economics.

The World Bank and the IMF led the first phase of this renewed policy dialogue. Not much progress was made, however, until the Swedes and, to a lesser extent, the other Nordic donors began to participate and take an active interest. This was precipitated in large part by visits by journalists. Articles soon began to appear in Swedish and other Nordic newspapers calling attention to the failures of the Tanzanian economy and, by implication, of Nordic programs. Tanzania was one of the largest recipients of Nordic assistance. Sweden was the largest bilateral donor of traditional assistance (the Japanese may have been nominally larger owing to huge non-project, scatter-gun grants of commodities and equipment) and the other Nordics were close behind. Before this the parliamentary system had helped to shield Nordic aid issues from the scrutiny of public opinion. As long as there was a consensus within the ruling party or coalition, party discipline prevented searching debate, let alone controversy. And the Scandinavians, as a group, were terrible Third World groupies, and they could be insufferably sanctimonious about it. They tended to see themselves as morally superior to the other donors because their aid was unconditional. They usually went along with the Tanzanians' claim that their policies were sound, only poorly implemented because of manpower shortages and training deficiencies. But the articles caused something of a taxpayers' revolt, and that produced a sea change in Nordic aid policy toward Tanzania.

And once the Tanzanians saw that the Swedes and other Nordics were raising the same issues they had preciously been hearing about from the U.S., the World Bank and the IMF, they knew the jig would soon be up. Also, the economy kept getting worse and worse. After a bit the Swedes in particular laid down a marker to the effect that their assistance could not continue at its previous volume unless the Tanzanians addressed the fundamental policy failures. From that point on, the Tanzanians became active partners in the dialogue with the Bank and the Fund.

The phase-out plan called for me to leave in the summer or fall of 1986, but I was transferred to Khartoum as Deputy Director in May 1986 following R and R. It wasn't too long after I left that the real turnaround began. They came up with a revised policy framework and that led to debt rescheduling which took care of Brooke. Joe Stepanek was sent out as AID Representative. A core FSN staff, a housing pool, an administrative framework and a logistics base were there for him and his U.S. direct-hire team to work with. There could have been a lot less.

It is a good example of the conflict between short-term and long-term goals and, in my opinion, the benefits of emphasizing the latter. Tanzania certainly continues to have a lot of problems. It is still a very poor country. But there is economic growth now. It is, to a large extent, an open economy. There is significant corruption, but it is also a society that has demonstrated a capability for course correction. I think it is one of the most stable political entities in Africa. They have demonstrated that they have the capacity to process corrective feedback constructively.

Q: What programs were you working on that continued or that you were keeping alive?

GILBERT: One of them was a school construction project in two provinces in the center of the country. I believe we cut back on the original plan and concentrated on rehabilitating essential classroom spaces plus providing washing facilities and VIP (ventilated, improved, pit?) latrines so that the schools could be used for environmental sanitation and health demonstration sites.

Then there was a project called Training for Rural Development (TRD) II. And a nice, (unauthorized and) summary description of that project was that it was designed, in effect, to make the government system for administration of the rural economy function despite itself. The 1968 Arusha Declaration had laid out a policy of villagization and non-market-oriented development for the rural sector. This amounted to mild collectivization of the peasantry. It was the cornerstone of the Tanzanian rural development strategy. TRD II and its predecessor aimed to develop administrative systems as well as leadership and management skills among the cadre of regional- and district-level officers on whom the implementation of rural development depended. The project was extremely popular and the two USDA PASA technicians who ran it were probably the best loved and most widely plugged in members of the American community. It was successful in achieving its outputs of trained staff and related behavioral changes. The civil servants it served were highly motivated and had an impressive esprit de corps, too. I believe the project was essentially a good one and that it made a lasting contribution to Tanzanian development.

But I fear that Tanzania's leadership saw this project as the silver bullet that would make development occur in the rural areas by force of the leadership, dedication and efficiency of an elite cadre of government administrators notwithstanding the dearth of transport infrastructure and services, of produce and inputs markets and of funding for public health services and education resulting from Tanzania's deeply flawed rural development model which gave no legitimate scope to market forces and private commerce.

We were also implementing three other projects. We were working with the Tanzania Rural Development Bank to establish a village-level lending program. We were involved in Farming Systems Research through a contract with Oregon State University. I can't remember the counterpart institution that we were working with. Maybe the most interesting project we had was with the Zanzibar health ministry on malaria eradication.

I learned a number of lessons in Tanzania. One of them was to be wary of the ideal employee. In a sense we suffered from too examples of the "ideal employee" syndrome. We had an Asian-Tanzanian guy in the GSO operation who was an extremely attractive, personable individual. He was unbelievably dedicated and efficient. Everyone loved him, especially the Marines – who were not famous for their admiration of the local people. He played on the AID softball team and hit several home runs every game. He had a nice family. No doubt, like many of our Tanzanian employees, he was worried about his

future. Unlike most, he decided to take bold action. One day he just didn't come to work anymore. We found out that he and his family had gone to Canada on tourist visas. We immediately audited all the stocks and funds that he had had anything to do with. It turned out that he had managed to divert about \$40,000 worth of gasoline from the GSO gas supply.

The other example was really bizarre. The School Health project had a technical assistance component that was implemented under a contract with John Snow International. The person who had been Chief of Party for several years had departed post a few weeks before I got there, and the new Chief of Party arrived not long after I did. The new chief of party was a young woman. She was smart and energetic. Maybe about three or four weeks after her arrival I noted that she went from being cheerful and bouncy to preoccupied and subdued. Finally, she came in one day and told me she was not getting the cooperation she needed from some of the national staff of the contracting firm. She was also getting active non-cooperation from her main counterpart in the Ministry of Health. None of what she described was acceptable. Some amounted to petty harassment, but some of it was serious. She was asking for and not being given key records, including financial accounting records. The more she probed the nastier the Tanzanians on her contract and her Ministry of Health counterpart became. To me it seemed that they were trying to intimidate her into getting back into her box, so to speak. From then on we worked with her to deal with the situation. She managed to get one document and study it at home. It revealed discrepancies. Finally she got the firm's home office to send out copies of documents that they had which confirmed that something was fishy. At that point, or even earlier, we notified the Inspection and Investigation Staff (IIS) of the Regional Inspector General's (RIG) Office in Nairobi. A few days later the Regional Investigator, and his Kenyan assistant arrived in Dar and began an investigation.

In order to understand the picture they pieced together over several visits, I have to give some background. The former Chief of Party was an archetypal "big man on campus" or "local hero" in the American official community. He charmed everyone, including the Ambassador on whose guest lists he and his wife usually figured. He not only had charisma, but he was the kind of person who seemed always able to solve problems that buffaloed others. Everyone owed him a favor. He had brought out an airplane that he used for getting back and forth to the various School Health project sites. His wife ran a dancing school that was very popular in the international community. He often stood in for the Regional Medical Officer when his travels took him away from the Embassy Health Unit.

I'm not sure I can accurately remember everything that he had been doing. I remember for sure that he had been converting dollars advanced for project local costs into Tanzanian shillings on the black market at several multiples of the official exchange rate. This allowed him to meet all sorts of expenses including those for operating his plane for non-project purposes. But this was just one part of a larger picture. He had a Ph.D. in Public Health, but had passed himself off to the Regional Medical Officer as an M.D. and had been practicing medicine within the American community. He managed to convince the

Embassy administrative office that he should be allowed to convert a good portion of the black market local currency back into dollars at the official rate. I think he convinced the Embassy that his wife's dance school was sort of a community service that generated local currency in excess of their needs, which was a doubtful proposition because most of the students were international. He had involved at least some of the Tanzanian project staff and some of the Ministry of Health staff in these shenanigans. It was an amazing tangle. Even though our project had not really suffered any financial loss, the sums that the Chief of Project had been fiddling between the black market and the Embassy accommodation exchange were large – many tens of thousands if not over a hundred thousand dollars.

In the end, the IIS recommended against pursuing the investigation to a conclusion. They reasoned that they couldn't put a case together without bringing the Tanzanian Government into the investigation. That would probably mean that I and other senior people in the U.S. Mission would wind up spending vast amounts of time dealing with the resulting furor rather than running our programs. The "suspect" had mainly broken Tanzanian laws, and it was extremely doubtful that, at the end of the day, IIS would have a case that would stand up in a U.S. court. The Tanzanians may or may not have wanted to try him together with his confederates, but it would have chewed up huge amounts of time and money to get him extradited to Tanzania. Meanwhile the U.S. Mission would look terrible in the eyes of the Tanzanian Government even if the case were successfully tried. But the too likely scenario might be that the Tanzanians would try some of their citizens and send them to prison while the U.S. would not be able to extradite the main perpetrator or even convict him of breaking U.S. laws. This would obviously make the U.S. look terrible and have negative repercussions, to say the least, on the bilateral relationship. (At that point – probably in late 1983 or early 1984 – the State Department still seemed to have nearly normal regard for the sensitivities of the Tanzanians.) Another consideration was the airplane. What nefarious uses he might have put it to didn't bear thinking about. This was not only an example of the perfect employee syndrome. It also showed that a malefactor can get away with a great deal if his or her actions make enough other people, especially influential ones, look foolish or lax. This experience led me in the remaining ten years of my career to pay close attention to situations where people could potentially gain exemption from normal controls on their conduct because of friendship with me or other "higher ups" in the U.S. Mission.

Q: You say he was an American. Had he already returned to the United States?

GILBERT: He was an American and, as far as we knew, he was in the United States. He had left the contracting firm. I think the IIS made a stab at finding him, but could not.

It was an unhappy time in Tanzania, in many ways. But I learned a lot and really value those three years. Tanzania is such an interesting and unique country.

As you know, AID has a nagging, continuous problem with participant trainees who don't want to return home after completing their U.S. training programs. Someone in the Office

of International Training told me that one of the lowest non-return rates was for Tanzania. Despite all its problems, Tanzania under Julius Nyerere had become a society that Tanzanians valued a great deal. There is very little tribalism. Almost everybody speaks Swahili as the national language. This meant that there was a national culture that most people could share in. It was a very egalitarian society. Few were rich, but most educated people seemed able to live with a modicum of comfort. There are a lot of intertribal marriages among the educated.

The economy operated along interesting lines. There was very little in the stores except for the items from Eastern Bloc countries that no one wanted to buy. Most Tanzanians worked for the Government or for parastatals. Their pay was just about enough to cover their food requirements and pay the rent on the subsidized housing they received through their employer. Each government unit or parastatal had a cooperative through which employees received allocations of staple foods. If they wanted much more than that out of life, like to be able to buy school uniforms for their kids, they had to have another source of income. Almost everyone had a substantial garden or small farm (shamba, which literally means “field”). But it seemed that most people or families also ran a small business of some kind. Some might own a taxi and hire a drivers to run them. Others might have milk cows or laying hens. Some women might make clothes to order. It was ironic that the failure of this socialist economy forced everyone to become a small-scale entrepreneur, breaking the rules of the economy in order to prevent its collapse. And the higher ups in the only legal party almost universally ran businesses – the bigger the official the bigger the business. Now that’s hypocrisy.

Q: How did you find them to work with?

GILBERT: On the whole, they were good to work with. The only really foul ball that I had to deal with was the Ministry of Health official responsible for the School Health project. He was a crook. (I settled him down by showing him the draft of an official letter that I would have sent if he didn’t back off. The letter summarized the positions he had been taking on the School Health project in the context of explaining why they were unacceptable to us.) But he was the exception that proved the rule. The rest were a pleasure to deal with except when they were feuding with one another. There were a number of individuals – especially those with U.S. or British training - who were extremely effective and very dedicated. All of these people freely acknowledged that Tanzania’s African socialist economic policies and strategies had failed and needed to be changed. That was an almost universal opinion. The universally held corollary was that those policies couldn’t change until “Mwalimu” (or “Teacher”, the rather reverential universal nickname-title accorded to Nyerere) stepped down. Most Tanzanians considered him to be a great man (and I agree) who suffered from a major blind spot when it came to economic issues.

One of the best of our Tanzanian colleagues was the person they placed at the head of an inter-ministerial committee they established to program counterpart currencies to be used for development budget support. We had excellent relations with him. We managed to

make sure that our projects got priority within the development budget and, once those needs were met, we sought priority for other donor project-related items. The Chairman of this Committee (or he may have been the Secretary with a more senior figure as the titular chairman) was a young man named Vincent Mrisho, who served in an agricultural policy and planning unit that may have been headed by Simon Mbalini. Vincent really ran with this responsibility. He set up a committee with sharp people from all the ministries. We assigned our Program Officer to be the USAID liaison with this committee. Cap Dean was our Program Officer and my de facto Deputy my the first two years or so there. Our technical staff also attended meetings when appropriate. Vincent and we agreed on a system that required pretty clear project-type documentation for proposed uses of counterpart funds. Thus these uses had to be justified in terms of a definite outcome over a specific period of time. Each allocation had to have sponsors who would take responsibility for monitoring implementation and for writing progress and completion reports. Our Tanzanian collaborators seemed sincerely committed to the system and process because it was rational and produced a lot of good outcomes, something that was very rare in their world.

Q: Were there lasting effects?

GILBERT: Well the activities and physical works that were financed with counterpart funds produced real benefits for a time. The same was true of all that we accomplished in wrapping up our dollar-funded projects. I'm confident of this. What I'm not sure of is how sustainable over the longer run our accomplishments proved to be. To me the experience and the skills gained by our Tanzanian counterparts were equally important as the other results of our projects. At least one among all these people went on to bigger things. I had a reunion with Vincent Mrisho while on a consultancy in Tanzania in 1994. At that time he was the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Industries and Trade.

Q: Were there any remnants of earlier USAID projects that were effective as you recall?

GILBERT: Well there were a number of projects that were in their last year during FY 1984. These included the Seed Multiplication and Distribution, Agricultural Research, Farmer Training and Production, Livestock Marketing and Development, Agriculture Education and Extension and Continuing Education for Health Workers projects.

Q: What happened with these projects?

GILBERT: These activities were completed with some foreshortening of their durations and work programs so that operations ended pretty much by the end of FY 84. There were probably some continuing expenditures and completion reports to be completed. Some of this work was done for us by REDSO so that we didn't have to keep project managers around solely for those kinds of formalities. I frankly don't remember much about those projects. Cap Dean might remember more about them since he was the Program Officer and their continuing needs no doubt figured in the deliberations of the counterpart programming committee.

Q: I see. What about the universities?

GILBERT: I believe we had a relationship with the degree level agricultural education facility in Morogoro (which was, I believe, a Faculty of the University of Dar es Salaam). We must have had a technical assistance team there at one point, but I'm pretty sure it had departed before I arrived. I believe Joe Goodwin and his assistant had collaborated with Adolpho Mascarenas at the University of Dar es Salaam. He was the guiding spirit of a little policy think tank out there.

Q: But you weren't in on the university project?

GILBERT: I don't remember being aware of any activities of that type. My belief that we were involved with Morogoro comes from something I was told when we were invited to a commencement exercise there.

Q: How did the Zanzibar malaria project work?

GILBERT: It accomplished a reduction in the incidence of malaria. It had to grapple with two unexpected obstacles. One was chloroquine resistance in the parasite. The other was DDT resistance in the mosquito that was the vector for the parasite. I can't remember what we used on malaria cases that didn't respond to chloroquine, but we used a product called Malathion in place of DDT for spraying the mosquitoes. It was an interesting project. We were hopeful that we could sharply reduce the incidence of malaria on the islands of Pemba and Unguja owing to their distance from the mainland and their relatively small populations.

The islands of Zanzibar (chiefly Pemba and Unguja) are part of Tanzania, as you know. They constitute quite a distinct society, however. The population is solidly Muslim and the political culture was more Marxist as compared to the mainland brand of Socialism, which has been described as Fabian in character and definitely non-Marxist by knowledgeable observers. One had the feeling on Zanzibar that big brother was watching you. There was a kind of militant feeling to the place. The Zanzibari Director of the Malaria Project was a youngish man named Dr. Juma Muchi. He had received most of his higher education at the University of Kharkov in the Soviet Union. He was an excellent, hard-driving manager and a technically sound public health physician.

Q: Why would we have a project there?

GILBERT: Since Zanzibar was part of the country, USAID needed to have a project there and tackling malaria seemed highly appropriate. I found the project in place. I believe it was the only active AID malaria project in the world. The Zanzibar islands seemed to offer a reasonable hope of achieving lasting success in reducing malaria's incidence to an acceptably low level and keeping it there with only modest external help.

Q: The goal wasn't eradication?

GILBERT: Zanzibar is separated from the mainland by something like 25 miles. That would probably prevent infected mainland mosquitoes from spreading the parasite, but people go back and forth constantly and in considerable numbers. So there would always be some reinfection of the mosquitoes. The main activities were spraying houses and the environs of settled areas plus the draining some bodies of stagnant water near urban areas. I can't remember what role mosquito nets played. I think the treated mosquito net campaign came later once the project closed. We never even considered screening because that would require sweeping cultural change. It would be almost impossible to bring about.

Q: Anything more on Tanzania at this point.

GILBERT: I think that is it. I would mention about Tanzania that one of its pleasures was getting to know Jane Goodall.

Q: Who?

GILBERT: Jane Goodall, the chimpanzee lady.

Q: Oh!

GILBERT: She was a neighbor of ours.

Q: She was living in Dar?

GILBERT: Yes. Her son, "Grub" (real name Count Hugo Van Lawick, the somethingth), our middle son, Chris, and I got to be very good fishing buddies. Chris and I, in our boat, and Grub, in his, went on two fishing trips to Zanzibar. Chris and Grub went on an "unauthorized" fishing trip to Zanzibar in Grub's boat that lasted overnight and scared the daylight out of us. Chris was invited down to Gombe, quite a rare thing. While Chris was there with Grub, the two of them tangled with water cobras while engaged in underwater spear fishing at night in Lake Tanganyika. Shared anxieties about the crazy things our sons got up to plus social interaction at dinner parties caused us to "bond" with Jane.

Q: Gombe is where the research is being done?

GILBERT: Yes, the research on the chimps. Anyway, that is just an aside.

Q: Well...

GILBERT: I guess the other thing I would say is that I thought Nyerere was one of the most admirable African leaders I ever encountered.

Q: Did you ever meet him?

GILBERT: Yes, I shook hands with him a couple of times. We never talked though. He was a very classy guy. As was so often the case among the post-independence leaders of former British colonies, he had no understanding of even basic economic principles. He freely admitted to making mistakes in a lot of areas, but could never bring himself to admit that his economic policies were wrong. This may have been an ego problem. I think it was so much a part of his personal belief system that he couldn't renounce his socialist beliefs any more than his Catholicism.

On the other hand if he was unable to say it he was able to perceive what he had to do to remedy the situation. He stepped aside. There aren't too many cases where African leaders prepared their own removal from power.

Q: That's right.

GILBERT: And he knew very well that this meant that new policies would be developed and applied. And once he was out of power, he mainly stayed in the background. I believe he was still head of the party for a period. As such, he would occasionally make a pronouncement on some national issue, but I don't think he ever undercut the more market-oriented policies that the new leaders put in place.

Before we leave Tanzania, I want to explain the philosophy that guided my approach to the program phase-out that Tanzania's Brooke status made necessary. The key fact to me was that we had project agreements with the Tanzanians. I believe that when we sign an agreement we should live up to it, unless the cooperating country violates its terms or we are prevented by something akin to force majeure. Brooke falls into that category, but I felt that there was no reason for us to be any harsher than necessary. The Government may have become less deserving owing to its failure to service U.S. government debts and to undertake policy reform. But the Government as Government is only one partner and its stake in development projects is often rather indirect, abstract or, even, theoretical. This contrasts with the stake that counterpart managers and technicians have. Their professional fortunes are much more concretely linked to our programs. Neither they nor the humbler beneficiaries of our projects bear any blame for the shortcomings of the Government as Government. And both these professional and humbler beneficiaries have often bet their livelihoods and interests to some degree on the expectations created by our programs and projects. So I thought, and still think, that it is immoral to break faith with these real people unless there is no other choice, and, even then, only to the extent absolutely necessary.

As an AID officer, I never saw myself as responsible for defining or actively promoting U.S. interests. I saw myself as constrained to operate within the framework of U.S. interests as defined by the State Department or other appropriate authorities, but as otherwise obligated to promote economic development to the extent feasible and consistent with proper use of the taxpayers' funds. Of course, on the few and rather brief

occasions when I was asked to serve as Charge d'Affaires, I considered that I ceased to be first and foremost an AID officer.

Q: Okay. What happened after Tanzania?

Assignment as Deputy Director and Mission Director in USAID/Sudan - 1986-1990

GILBERT: Well, in 1986 I went to Sudan as Deputy Director. I arrived there on my birthday, May 28. It was a very troubled time. Jaafar Nimeiri, the long-time President and dictator, had been forced from power by popular protests and strikes about a year earlier because he had embraced Islamic fundamentalism and introduced Sharia law. This had caused re-ignition of the civil war in Southern Sudan. The interim government was pretty weak and ineffectual. Extremist Arab groups began harassing the U.S. community. On April 15th or 16, 1986, an American Embassy communicator, who had been called in to deal with a NIAC cable, was followed and shot as he drove home from the Embassy. He was permanently disabled.

Q: An embassy staff member?

GILBERT: Yes. Either the same day or the next day, an AID wife employed in the office of the Defense Attaché narrowly escaped somebody with a gun who approached her car in a traffic jam.. The ambassador called an evacuation of all dependents and of all nonessential staff.

John Koehring had arrived a few weeks earlier than me to assume his duties as Mission Director. He and I shared a house. Besides John and me, there were four other U.S. direct hires there to manage the AID Mission. The USAID national staff and we six Americans ran things as best we could until the end of October. After that, there was a phased return of U.S. direct hire staff and dependents.

During the evacuation period we essentially mothballed AID development programs. We still took some program actions, but we did so mainly to the extent necessary to enable essential Sudanese Government operations related to our projects to go forward.

But we couldn't mothball our emergency programs. Also, the Sudanese seemed to expect a lot of official and social interaction with us. This was, no doubt, in large part an effort to reassure us that they valued our presence. It was also a function of Joe Goodwin's having known people like the Minister of Finance when he was a U.S.-trained economics professor at the University of Khartoum. I never before or after experienced so much "face time" with Ministerial level host government officials, and we were about as busy as I've ever been. We had at least four disaster response programs going simultaneously at that time. During the four years that I was there, I think we had 11 declared disasters.

Q: You were there four years?

GILBERT: Yes, from May 1986 to June 1990. There were two or three western drought emergencies. I arrived just as the first was winding down. There were two locust outbreaks. There was one rat plague. And then there were at least two declarations regarding the civil war in the south. There was the flooding of 1988. Of the biblical Egyptian plagues, we joked that we had them all except for frogs.

At that time the AID economic program in Sudan was the biggest in the Africa Bureau. It was certainly the biggest mission in the Sub-Sahara Africa. As a result of Sudan's good behavior with regard to Camp David and its cooperation with the evacuation of the Falasha Jews from Ethiopia to Israel, the combined Development Assistance, Economic Support Funds (ESF) and PL 480 Title I budget was pretty close to \$100 million dollars, and maybe more. That involved both non-project and project assistance.

To my recollection, there was never a time during my four years there when we were not managing three or four emergency response programs. In addition to strictly Sudanese emergencies, we were involved in shipping food through Sudan to feed distressed populations in rebel-held territories of Ethiopia, chiefly Eritrea.

Q: Were you involved in Eritrea refugee support?

GILBERT: There were large numbers of Eritrean and other Ethiopian refugees in Sudan. I believe the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the PVOs that worked with them on refugee feeding dealt directly with the Humanitarian Bureau of the State Department, an attache of the Embassy responsible for refugee matters and the food aid office of AID in Washington.

I thought and still think that I worked hard, too hard, during the years I spent in Washington on the Sahel program, but I never worked harder in my life than during those four years in Sudan. The workload including the large amount of representation, that we got caught up in combined to pose a major challenge to our physical endurance. This was exacerbated by an accidental factor. The Sudanese workweek ran from Saturday to Thursday. Ours was supposed to be from Sunday through Thursday. But since the GOS worked on Saturday, and Washington worked on Friday, we were often needed by AID/W on Friday and by the Government of Sudan on Saturday. Also, Immediate and even NIAC cables were fairly commonplace both for the Embassy and for AID. And, since lots of people finally got the clearances on Thursday or Friday on the cables they drafted earlier in the week, we seldom were spared dealing with urgent cables on Fridays and Saturdays.

During that whole period Jane always tried to make sure when we went out at night to something that required us to sit for any length of time, that we were never placed in full view of other people. This was to avoid embarrassment because she knew that I could not sit quietly for more than five minutes without falling asleep. She worried that people would think I was a drunk.

But it was oddly exhilarating. It was exhilarating and wearing perhaps in the same way that working in a hospital emergency room might be. You had the feeling that if you overslept or screwed up it might cost human lives. Conversely, if you succeeded in your efforts to squeeze 12 hours of work into an 11-hour day, you could have the satisfaction of feeling that it made a real difference to people's lives and livelihoods.

Earlier, in relation to Ghana, we were talking about how many Ghanaian friends we made and how meaningful that made those years for us. Sudan may have run about even with Ghana in terms of the number of Sudanese who became not just acquaintances, but friends whom we got to know in some depth. The Sudanese are extremely hospitable people, and the Sudanese elite is quite cosmopolitan. On the whole, they are very appealing people.

One thing that keeps Sudan economically afloat is their good system of higher education. The University of Khartoum, apart from one or two universities in the Republic of South Africa, is the oldest in Sub-Saharan Africa. It produces well-trained people in a variety of fields in numbers beyond the country's needs. Many Sudanese university professors, physicians, airline pilots, police and military officers, magistrates and judges are employed in the Middle East. They speak Arabic, they are very observant Muslims, they stay out of local politics, they are conspicuous and easy to watch because they are Black and, not really comfortable outside Sudan, they seldom settle permanently abroad. All of these characteristics plus their knowledge and skills make them ideal intellectual guest workers. There are also lower level Sudanese guest workers in many Middle Eastern and North Africa countries. High or low level, they all remit significant shares of their earnings to their families at home, and they mostly return to Sudan with assets to invest in a farm or a business.

And so, an interesting thing about Sudan is that, even though the government was always broke, the country never seemed to be. There was a tremendous amount of production in the irrigated sector (cotton, rice, sorghum, groundnuts) and in the large-scale, mechanized, rain-fed agricultural sector (sorghum, sesame and, I believe, soybeans). Both sectors generated large volumes of exports. Sudan, being a very disorganized country, the Government was not able to collect taxes or control their borders very effectively. Since, with the exception of cotton, these exports passed mainly through private trading networks, only a portion of the earnings flowed through formal channels. This means that large revenue flows were not taxed and only a portion of the foreign exchange earnings was captured by the Central Bank. So the Government was always on the verge of financial collapse. Yet there was an impressive amount of commercial activity. Although there were few modern retail establishments, such as the super markets and department stores that one could find in some of the more market-oriented African countries – such as Kenya, Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire - consumer goods, including appliances, were abundant in people's houses. People somehow got their hands on decent cars. People seemed to have the kinds of foodstuffs that they needed for the national cuisine, which was Middle Eastern with a few local idiosyncrasies. Just to show how "loosey goosey" the economy was, we used U.S.-controlled local currency to buy Isuzu all-terrain vehicles

that were imported for us from Saudi Arabia. The money changed hands in Sudan, but the cars were imported pursuant to our orders.

Q: What were the main program activities?

GILBERT: Well we had everything that AID does except for low-cost housing. We had a PL 480 Title I program that supplied wheat and wheat flour for bread making. It was used to encourage the Sudanese to reduce bread subsidies and, later on, to promote use of sorghum flour to reduce the country's dependence on imported wheat. There were annual Commodity Import Programs. The only thematics that I can recall concerning the CIP – and this would be just for one of them – had to do with getting Sudan away from purchasing crude oil for their refinery on the spot market, which was unnecessarily expensive.

We had some very interesting development projects. There had been a number of such projects for the South, but these had been suspended or terminated months before I arrived. These included a couple of roads and road maintenance projects, an agricultural development project and a large training project. For the North, the main focus was on Western Sudan's rain-fed agricultural sector. The Western Agriculture Road project consisted of AID's section of a road to link Western Sudan's 10 million acres of cultivable land to Khartoum and world markets. This was complemented by the Kordofan Rain-fed Agriculture project, which comprised a cooperative-based agricultural credit component implemented with technical assistance provided by Technoserve plus the construction of feeder roads and the provision of grain storage facilities. The Western Sudan Agricultural Research project focused on developing higher yielding varieties of sorghum, millet, peanuts and sesame. The Agriculture Planning and Statistics project aimed to strengthen agriculture sector planning and policy development functions.

In the energy sector, the Energy Planning and Management project assisted in the management of the Blue Nile Power Grid that served the irrigated agriculture sector and most of the country's industrial sector as well as the Khartoum urban area. Rural Renewable Energy consisted of grants to increase the supply and efficiency of local fuel wood resources and included improved charcoal-burning stove as well as land cover mapping components.

In the health sector the Rural Health Support project supported an Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI) campaign and the Model Family Planning project aimed to consolidate the efforts and approaches supported by a multiplicity of AID centrally funded PVOs and contractors into an AID-supported, Sudanese national program.

We also had a variety of PVOs - including CARE, Save the Children (SCF), World Vision, CRS, Action Plan International and others - engaged in centrally-funded development activities around various parts of Northern Sudan.

As in Tanzania, but on a much larger scale, the Government of Sudan and USAID Sudan programmed counterpart local currencies through the Development Budget in support of AID projects and many other priorities. We had a very collaborative and productive working relationship with the section of the Ministry of Finance that was responsible for development planning and management of the Development Budget. That group was headed by Mohammed El Kheir el Zubeir, who is now Sudan's Finance Minister.

Maybe it's because the development program was pretty straightforward and managed well by the Mission's technical divisions that my most vivid memories are of our struggles with our various emergency assistance programs. The General Development Office, which ran the emergency programs, was staffed with highly capable people, but they were stretched too thin and their portfolio was inherently chaotic and crisis ridden. We did virtually everything thorough such PVOs as CARE, World Vision, Action International Against Hunger (AICF) the International Rescue Committee and many, many others. And all this relief activity had to be accepted by and nominally coordinated by the Sudan government through a body called something like the High Commission for Relief Coordination (HCRC). This body's posture varied between mildly constructive and loosely obstructionist. Which tendency would prevail at any particular moment sometimes seemed to reflect the Government's attitude toward the current mix of emergencies and its relationships with the donor/PVO community, but at other times appeared at variance with one or the other or both. The HCRC was mainly responsible for monitoring and processing Government approval of all emergency relief-related travel and program funding decisions. The donors and PVOs did the real work of managing the emergency program under the coordination of the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) Resident Coordinator.

The Sudanese government was not a very coherent operation. Some organizations – for example, the parastatals that ran the large irrigation schemes like the Gezira - seemed pretty well managed. Impressive people were in evidence in most of the organizations that we worked with, but the collective outcomes always seemed to fall well short of the arithmetic sum of the individual efforts. A lack of accountability encouraged anarchic behavior. There would be certain people whom you could work with, but then, as often as not, you would find others had undone your work with them. Sometimes people lower down in a structure would overrule their bosses. Sometimes this would result from a breakdown in communications, but at other times it was sheer, bloody-minded waywardness. People could get away with such things since Ministries were often in the hands of, or even divided among, competing political or religious fiefdoms and cliques. It was widely understood that the staff of certain sections of one ministry consisted largely of Communists while that of another were Muslim Brothers.

As a result of all this squirrely business the donor community usually needed to operate on two levels: the managerial and the diplomatic. Managing our resources was the straightforward part. Getting needed cooperation - mostly just a matter of concurrences - required constant diplomatic activity. Given the importance of the relief efforts and the fact that the heads of UNDP and the European Union had ambassadorial status, the

American, British, Dutch, French and German missions were involved at that level. This was essential to our success. It added interest to the work because of the camaraderie that developed among the Ambassadors and the managers, including me, who ran the programs. I don't think I ever got to know the senior members of the diplomatic corps or the ministerial level host government officials to such a degree as in Sudan. But it also meant that we spent a huge amount of time in meetings within the donor/PVO community and with the Sudanese. This meant that we in USAID had to work hand in glove with the American Ambassador and DCM. That worked pretty well under Hume Horan and Norman Anderson and their DCMs (David Shinn and Dane Smith, respectively). I found it a good deal more difficult under their successors, basically because of their personal styles, which were usually, and on occasion breathtakingly, "top down." I think I managed to prevent that style from overriding the management of AID operations more than was warranted, but doing that was wearing – like being in car driven by a reckless driver.

Running emergency programs generally require a great deal of logistical planning and management. Sometimes it can require investment in essential infrastructure. For example, during the great Western Sudan drought emergency that was just concluding in 1986, the U.S. provided the Sudanese a substantial number, say ten or twelve, railway locomotives.

We usually had one logistical expert planning and tracking delivery arrangements for U.S. emergency aid in coordination with other experts who worked for the UN Agencies such as World Food Program (WFP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the European Union (EU) and, to a lesser extent, the other bilateral donors. For the most part, this was a question of getting relief off-loaded from ships in Port Sudan and Mombasa for road transport to the South and for road and rail transport to Western Sudan. But, when the situation became urgent in Southern Sudan, we made massive use of airlifts. We also began to use rail and river transport to reach certain Southern destinations. From that point on it became necessary for the relief community, through the UN, to coordinate with the Southern rebels, the SPLA.

Q: I see.

GILBERT: When you consider that there were usually at least three operations of this kind going on at one time, we really had our hands full. It wasn't long before it became clear that either John Koehring or I would have to spend an awful lot of time on relief matters and that it would be quite wasteful if we didn't agree that one of us would mainly handle relief matters while the other mainly handled development program matters. In early 1988, we decided that I would oversee relief.

This meant that I did a lot of traveling both in Northern Sudan and also to the South. The only way to go to Southern Sudan was to fly. Until late 1988, we generally chartered aircraft from Nile Safaris, a company that operated about 12 twin-engine, pressurized Cessna and Piper aircraft. From Northern Sudan we could only fly to government-held

towns. Those that I visited were Juba, Wau, Malakal, Abyei and Aweil. We needed pressurized aircraft so we could fly at 12,500 feet or higher and, thereby, be out of range of the SAM missiles that the SPLA had. We would fly at that altitude to the town and then corkscrew down in tight circles just above the town to land. The idea was that the government soldiers on the ground maintained a perimeter around the town wide enough to keep the SPLA beyond range of the planes as they descended. Nevertheless, I personally know of four such flights that were shot down during or just after my time there. We sometimes heard firing while we were on the ground in these locations.

Before I left Khartoum, I turned over the financial records of the English-speaking Anglican congregation to a Scotsman who was a Nile Safaris pilot. He was shot down and killed about 10 days later. I had flown with him. In most cases the downed planes had failed to observe the “corkscrew” procedure. In one case, however, the SPLA had slipped a SAM missile launcher into a government-held town and hit a plane while it was doing the corkscrew maneuver. (After the first time or so, I developed a habit of discussing corkscrew procedure with the charter pilots in order to confirm that they understood its purpose and were committed to use it.)

When I left Sudan, I felt a sense of relief and gratitude that my U.S. Mission colleagues, my family and I had gotten through my time there unscathed. It’s the only job I had where colleagues and friends were killed carrying out their duties in the Southern war zone. Perhaps ten or so relief workers or pilots were killed and at least as many more had close calls that could have claimed their lives. I haven’t even talked about the terrorist threat, which remained a concern throughout our four years there. Well after the evacuation period had ended but before we moved into the Mission Director’s house in early 1989, there was a bomb attack by the Black September Group on the Acropole Hotel (where we occasionally went for dinner) and the mainly British Sudan Club. Another time, Iraqi agents assassinated a dissident Iraqi cleric in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel. After they shot their victim, they fired a random shot or two around the lobby, sauntered to the main entrance, got in a car with Iraqi diplomatic tags and drove away. As far as I ever heard the Sudanese never did anything about the Iraqi incident. I think they did cooperate in pursuing the perpetrators of the bombing. There were frequent security alerts. Given our knowledge that various Palestinian, Libyan, Iranian and other Middle Eastern terrorist groups were present in Sudan we took those things seriously. Most of us varied our routes and exercised caution about leaving our cars unattended and about driving and walking around in public places. But that was just a matter of making things a little more difficult for anyone who wanted to get us. There was no way we could go about the business of living without accepting an environmental risk – in effect, that if they really wanted to get some of us they would eventually have their chance.

Q: Did we have an office in Juba at that time?

GILBERT: Yes. AID owned a large compound in Juba. It contained office facilities, a warehouse, a maintenance workshop, residences and a swimming pool in a campus-like setting. It was quite a pleasant layout. I believe the last U.S. direct-hire officer based in

Juba had departed about a year before my arrival in May 1986. Whenever I went down there I was gratified and somewhat touched by the way the national staff took care of the place. It was always spic and span, the vehicles and other equipment were in good operating order and the houses were well maintained and ready for temporary occupancy by TDYers. They also maintained good communications with the Regional Government that was based in Juba. I don't remember for sure whether Juba was considered the capital of the Southern Region or only of Equatoria at that point.

Q: They were running projects out of there?

GILBERT: No. Our development projects in the South had been suspended for some time. Project commodities (including road maintenance equipment) were stored in Juba and the Juba staff monitored these arrangements. As for relief projects, USAID Khartoum managed AID emergency relief grants to PVOs working in government-controlled areas as well as contracts for the movement of food down to the South from the North. REDSO in Nairobi managed similar grants to PVOs working in rebel-held territory and contracts for moving food up to Southern Sudan from Kenya through Uganda and/or Zaire. The Juba staff facilitated and supported the conduct of relief work in and around Juba mostly by making the communications and other facilities of the USAID compound available to PVOs and donor agencies. For some time, we had also been allowing the donor/PVO community resident in Juba to operate a recreation club based on use of the swimming pool whose costs they covered.

Q: Wasn't Juba in the middle of the civil war then?

GILBERT: Well, it was, and sometimes the SPLA were more or less at the gates of the city, but they never got inside the city of Juba. Most of the time that I was there the government managed to control substantial areas around Juba plus a corridor that ran south to Nimule on the border with Uganda and southwest through Yei to the border with Zaire. The government often had control of the Nile from Juba to the border with Uganda and sometimes for a distance to the north of Juba.

Q: But this was federal territory in...

GILBERT: Yes, central government territory. And our compound was U.S. diplomatic property in Juba. We wanted to make sure that its integrity was respected. Even so, there were times when it was damaged by stray bullets on the occasions when the SPLA made incursions close to Juba.

We had a policy of letting the Sudanese staff and their families come out if they wanted to. But most of the staff elected to remain in Juba, although some would come up from time to time for consultations and a breather – especially if things were “bad”. Usually “bad” was a matter of food shortages and electricity outages, but there were a few occasions when it was a function of stronger than usual SPLA attacks. The government forces usually managed to stop these well short of the city, but the SPLA occasionally got

so close that fears arose lest they might use artillery despite the risks to the civilian population. Then, in 1991 or so, about a year after I left, the SPLA again came close to taking the city. I believe there was some shelling. The Army or some security forces within the army rounded up a number of people who were suspected of being SPLA agents. Andrew Tombe, who was the senior Sudanese staff member in Juba, and a driver were arrested. Andrew was accused of communicating with the SPLA. Both were summarily shot. Andrew was a very dedicated and squared-away guy. I believe that shortly afterwards the compound ceased to operate as a U.S. Government installation. I don't know what disposition was made of it.

Q: Anything particular about the emergency operations, any lessons or experience that is instructive?

GILBERT: Well I learned a lot about PVOs.

Q: How did you find them to work with?

GILBERT: Unruly, by donor standards. They were a positive force but working with them could be a bit trying. Most of the PVO field staff were very good as individuals, especially in their moral dimension. Plenty of them were quite sophisticated and efficient to boot. Some of them were putting their lives on the line on a routine basis, especially those working in SPLA territory and, therefore, subject to indiscriminate government bombing and ground attacks by Arab militias as well as the Sudanese army. I came to have a particularly high regard for organizations such as Doctors without Borders, the Irish PVOs Concern and Goal, AICF (International Action against Hunger) and OXFAM/UK. But still, on the whole, the PVOs represent a much richer mixture of strong and weak and sane and insane and so forth than you have among the donors. One thing that I hadn't appreciated before is the intensity of competition among PVOs. This competition stems from the fact that, while PVOs genuinely do a lot of good in responding to disaster situations, they also have to exploit those situations for fund-raising purposes. This, I believe, lies at the root of some of the unseemly competition for visibility and roles that occurs among them.

Q: Right.

GILBERT: Fortunately, because of my experiences in the Sahel drought emergency, I had already learned some lessons that I was able to apply in Sudan. This was the more fortunate because I don't think John Koehring had been involved in the same way – that is with the Washington end of the Sahel drought emergency. I would have to say that I benefitted from knowing something of how Washington can sometimes behave when things are going badly in the field during an emergency situation. Being on the ground in such situations can be a bit dangerous because Washington – which in reality is more a field of forces than an operational entity - can hold the field unit accountable without admitting accountability itself.

And AID Washington goes through cycles of attention and inattention, concern and unconcern or even denial. For example in 1988 we were deluged with once-in-a-century rains from Khartoum all the way down to the northern parts of Southern Sudan. There was massive flooding throughout these areas. And, while it had been always been plenty difficult to get food to the areas in and around the South where it was needed, it suddenly became virtually impossible to do so. Khartoum and the surrounding areas were massively flooded, creating one of the all time great crazy situations. I'll come back to that.

All this hit when we were already in a major crisis because the war had been generating large numbers of newly displaced people. We couldn't track these people in the early phases of their movements because they were mostly wandering in the bush until the lucky ones who survived would suddenly begin flooding into government-held areas. We soon began to suspect that there were hundreds of thousands of people on the move. Even if they pitched up where we could in principle get food to them, tooling up for such an effort in a country the size of Sudan with its feeble transport infrastructure was dangerously time-consuming. We had been reporting on this situation and our efforts to deal with it within the context of already declared emergencies for weeks before the flooding hit. But once the flooding occurred, we not only found ourselves managing a new flood emergency relief program focused on the needs of many thousands of homeless people, but also trying to coordinate a southern emergency relief effort that had been pushed by the floods from crisis to hyper crisis status. We continued to react and report as best we could even though the Khartoum floods rendered all but the first one or two floors of our eight story building unusable and forced us to set up eight or so temporary offices around town.

As time passed our reporting and general cable traffic described the locations and the needs of the tens of thousands of southern displaced and the fact that ground transport was falling short and would continue to fall short of meeting the needs of many assemblies of the newly displaced needy populations that were being identified (sometimes only by hearsay). Airlifts were an obvious response in some of the larger government-held towns like Juba, Wau, Malakal and a few others, but some of the displaced were in areas where there were no usable airfields and where the SPLA were so close that the corkscrew maneuver wouldn't work even if the airfields had been usable. So reconnaissance visits, let alone airdrops, were not possible without grave risk to pilots and passengers in the air or to people on the ground if airdrops were attempted without proper advance arrangements.

But in any case, we maintained a flow of reporting on the situation and laid out the options that we could identify for dealing with the needs. We also requested the funding we needed to move forward. The replies we got from AID Washington consisted in large part of requests for more information on the situation plus queries about what other donors and the UN were planning to do and whether we had thought of this and that unrealistic option. And then the press began to show up. Not long after the press began to show interest, I got a phone call from Julia Taft, the Director of the Office of Foreign

Disaster Relief. The gist of her side of the conversation was something like: "We think it's time to do something and we want to send a team out there since you folks aren't really on top of the situation or coming to grips with it. My response can be summarized as, "We'd like to have that team and we will need the funding we have been asking for. We haven't been twiddling our thumbs. Have a look at the cable traffic." There was a little pause while she considered my rejoinder, but she let it pass without comment. It was all very polite, and I was enormously relieved that OFDA had decided to engage.

A rather large team arrived. I consisted of an OFDA Team Leader whom I won't name, plus the famous and late Fred Cuny, Larry Meserve from Food for Peace (FFP), Ron Libby (an OFDA contract employee), at least one other OFDA person, one or two other civilian experts and a military logistics team. They did some very good work. But it was soon also clear that the OFDA Team Leader saw us as his adversaries in a zero sum game. He acted as though he couldn't look good unless we looked bad. He was smart and very active, but he was an awful poseur. In his briefings of the donor heads of mission group – especially at the beginning before he digested the feedback he received - he would talk to them as if he was the resident who knew the lay of the land and the rest of us were the visitors who didn't know what had been going on or worse yet, didn't care. This wasn't only my own prickly reaction. Members of his own team had problems with him, and he had a knack for making the female members cry. Finally the dialogue between the OFDA team and the donor group brought the former to the realization that most of their good ideas couldn't be accomplished within the current rules which specified, inter alia, that we worked with the Government in Government-controlled areas, that communications with the SPLA were inadmissible and that cooperation with the SPLA was out of the question. This was an important realization and, to their great credit, OFDA concluded that the rules had to change.

Unpleasant as this process was, it turned out to be extremely worthwhile. The result was truly a paradigm shift that gave birth to Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). Julia Taft, a truly remarkable woman, managed to ratchet the political profile of the Southern Sudan humanitarian emergency to an unprecedented level. Her husband was Deputy Defense Secretary so she could call forth impressive levels of cooperation from the Pentagon and to a lesser extent from the upper echelons of the administration. She somehow tapped the head of UNICEF, James Grant, to be the UN system's coordinator of OLS. She organized a consensus within State, AID and the NSC in favor of a full-court diplomatic press on the Sudanese and, then, the SPLA to cooperate in assuring safe passage for relief food shipments by road, rail and air to the displaced in both government-held and SPLA-held territory. Even so it took some time and arm-twisting to get the Sudanese and, after them, the SPLA to accept this concept. But it was absolutely necessary because each side could use military means to either prevent relief from the others' areas absolutely or to make doing so unacceptably risky to international relief workers. And both sides were exceptionally bloody-minded about the issue. The Sudanese Government was convinced that the international relief community favored the SPLA and would smuggle weapons and ammunition to them in relief shipments. The SPLA was convinced that the

Government could and would force the relief agencies to carry supplies for their garrisons. Both sides, as has been said many times, were willing to use food as a weapon.

The developments, including the first OFDA team visit and at least one subsequent one, leading to the launching of OLS took place during the fall of 1988. Somewhere along the line – probably not long after the first OLS team had returned to Washington - Congress began to take renewed interest in Southern Sudan. We got a cable to the effect that AID higher ups were going to have to testify on the situation and that those preparing the briefing materials needed for us to answer a list of questions. And I didn't like the questions – too many of them were snotty and insinuatingly accusatory in tone. But we responded like good professionals, and our people prepared the information that had to be in Washington by COB on a given day. The answers formed two cables that came to me in the late afternoon of the day that they had to be received about seven hours later in Washington. There was just barely enough time to get them over to the Embassy for transmission as non-NIAC immediate cables before the Embassy communications unit closed down for the day. They were very long. I read through them quickly (for me) with one or two of the GDO staff pacing up and down outside my office. (John Koehring's need to deal with problems facing a member of his family in the U.S. kept him away from post during much, if not most, of 1988 until his departure later that year, so I was Acting Mission Director for extended periods.) The cables were fine except for one thing that prevented me from authorizing them. The GDO staffers almost had a collective stroke when I told them that, but when they understood what I wanted they enthusiastically and quickly complied. I had them reference every message that we had sent to Washington over the preceding six months on the matters that each addressed. The references, and the dates on which each was sent, required at least the initial page and a half of each message. This delay required that each cable be transmitted as a NIAC immediate, but that was helpful since it helped to insure the special handling needed on the other end.

I'll never know for sure, but I have a strong feeling that this exercise in low animal cunning made a great and positive difference in the way the Mission was regarded and listened to in the subsequent weeks and months as OLS was conceived, cobbled together and implemented. The tone of our communications with Washington improved immediately. I firmly believe that people in the humanitarian relief offices in Washington and, to a lesser extent, the Africa Bureau had been receiving our cables and not heeding them. And once the fat was in the fire, they were doing what comes naturally. The French have an expression that sums it up beautifully: "Les absents ont toujours tort." It's better than our "It's always the other guys fault," because the fundamentally human thing is to blame those who are absent and can't defend themselves. Another expression that bears on this is "Water (including waste water!) runs down hill." Washington is uphill from the field.

So the relief operation entered the OLS phase sometime during the fall of 1988. The UN was able to negotiate with the SPLA to allow trains to go from the North to some parts of the South and to send road convoys into SPLA territory from Kenya through Uganda and Zaire. But even so, it wasn't all smooth sailing. There were nasty incidents. The U.N.

Resident Representative at the time, Brian Wannop, led the UN team that accompanied the first train down from northern Sudan to Aweil and, perhaps, to Wau. They came very close to getting killed. The train was unguarded, but the Government and the SPLA had each agreed to facilitate the train's progress and assure its safety from their own forces. They did what they were supposed to do, and the train off-loaded relief supplies as it passed through both government-held and SPLA-held towns.

But there were progovernment, border-dwelling Arab militias and plain bandits who honored an ancient tradition by raiding into the Northern sections of Dinka country for cattle and slaves. The Government either couldn't control their activities or didn't choose to. From what I saw of the way things worked in Sudan, the Government probably couldn't control them and chose not to incur the domestic political cost of trying. I remember that in the negotiations with the Minister of Transportation (General Burmah Nasser) concerning the use of the train for this purpose, he seemed genuinely worried about the train's security from "bandits". As I recall, he wanted to have armed soldiers on the train, but this was not acceptable to the SPLA.

One of these militia or bandit groups stopped the train, took what relief supplies they wanted and abducted the UN party. They took them into the bush for several hours. During that time they debated whether they should hold them for ransom, kill them or let them go. At least one member of the party, a medical doctor, was Sudanese, and he heard the debate. The raiders finally decided to let the UN folks return to the train and let the train continue on its way.

Q: The supplies got through?

GILBERT: Yes, that time. I think there was one subsequent train, but that never really became a significant way of moving food. And the main way of getting food down to the south from the North was to fly it into the government-controlled towns (Wau, Malakal, Aweil and Juba). The most common mode of getting food to areas not served by operational airfields, whether SPLA- or Government-held, was by road from Mombasa across the Kenya, Uganda and Zaire borders. These road corridors were chancy because roads were prone to rapid deterioration with increased use, especially during the rainy season. Collapsed bridges were a frequent problem. I can't remember whether this happened before or during OLS, but there was a report of a convoy of about twelve trucks getting stuck in northeastern Zaire. They couldn't go backwards or forwards. After a while we heard that the drivers had taken local wives and become part of the Zairian community. Those supplies had to be written off. I don't know if the owners ever got their trucks back.

To return to the subject of relief logistics, one of the most challenging problems in mounting a large-scale emergency relief effort is off-loading, transporting and distributing relief supplies once they arrive in port. Port capacities are seldom adequate to deal with multiples of the normal volume of imports. The capacity of national trucking firms and railways are, at best, proportionate to the amount of haulage normally required for a nation's business (unless and until, as in Sudan's case, emergencies begin to seem

normal). When a large relief operation starts, transportation resources have to be bid away from the normal users. Prices mount accordingly. Sometimes donors and relief agencies have to augment the capacity of national systems as the U.S. did with the locomotives they provided during the western Sudan drought of the mid-1980s. An issue that frequently comes up is whether to finance increased port unloading and warehousing capacity. Another is whether to permit transport firms from neighboring countries to compete for relief business. For Southern Sudan this was a need but not much of an issue given that there was no choice but to use Kenyan trucking operators.

At the advent of OLS, it was necessary to bring in air transport operators for the needed airlifts of supplies and relief staff. AID financed the incorporation into OLS of a PVO called AirServe that specialized in flying relief supplies in humanitarian emergency situations. As I recall, they mainly operated Twin Otters. These guys did a wonderful job and, fortunately, none of them were hurt despite the fact that they operated at the limits of human endurance to maintain a steady stream of deliveries to places where, by then, the displaced were dying everyday by tens and hundreds, depending on the numbers gathered at each location. The Sudanese work gangs for loading and unloading on each end were so organized and so efficient that the planes were scarcely on the ground long enough for the pilots' pit stops and for refueling – and that only when necessary. It seems to me that they mostly didn't kill the engines because, absent those needs, they were on the ground only for five or ten minutes. I believe the work gangs were encouraged to compete with one another. For the larger towns with concrete airstrips, OLS used Hercules C-130s. Commercial contractors may have supplied some of these but Belgian, German and other air forces provided a fair number, if not all. I don't think the U.S. Air Force provided aircraft to OLS. If they did, it was early on and very briefly. As I recall, this was because the Defense Department couldn't allow its planes to be used for nonmilitary purposes without payment. I believe I was told that it would have cost OFDA more to reimburse the Pentagon than to hire the requisite C-130s from a commercial outfit like Southern Air.

One of the exciting things about Cynthia Taft's link through her husband to the Pentagon had been the prospect of their being more forthcoming in supporting the relief effort. But the only concrete manifestation of Defense Department involvement in Sudan relief work that I can recall came before OLS was even a gleam in anyone's eye. Shortly after the Khartoum and northern floods hit, a U.S. air force C-5 Starlifter, a huge aircraft that looks larger than a Boeing 747, arrived at the Khartoum airport loaded with relief supplies and equipment. That was an awesome sight. It came at a time when most neighboring Arab countries – who never made the slightest gesture that I can recall to help with less dramatic emergency needs such as the western drought or those of the southern displaced – had been sending C-130s loaded with relief supplies. The C-5 was, let's say, a striking symbolic reminder of who had been and who would continue to be doing the "heavy lifting" of meeting Sudan's relief needs.

This reminds me of something that bears on the question of the U.S. military helping to meet emergency relief needs. In the build up to OLS we found ourselves needing more and more to arrange transport down to some of the southern towns where the displaced

were gathering. Col. Joe Kennedy, our Defense Attaché (DATT) in Khartoum, a peach of guy – was anxious to do anything to be helpful. I believe he was in Army aviation rather than the Air Force. He and another officer in the DATT Office doubled as pilot and co-pilot of the DATT aircraft. He suggested using his training flight budget to fly us to these southern towns. We were thrilled because we had been told “no way” in response to our past requests for use the DATT aircraft (before Kennedy arrived) unless we were prepared to pay in appropriated funds, in which case they might consider it. Somehow it was clear that our interest was not at all welcome. Since we had no dollar budget for such flights, we could pay Nile Safaris in counterpart currency and they welcomed the business, we made the obvious choice. But we hoped that Joe would get an okay when he checked signals with the Pentagon on his training flights idea.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Joe told us that they wouldn’t let him do it because that would take him into a war zone, and it involved a risk to him and the aircraft that they couldn’t accept. Apparently if one of us civilians had gotten hurt, killed or taken hostage that would be unfortunate but that wouldn’t be the Pentagon’s problem to explain or otherwise deal with. However, if that happened to members of the armed forces it would have wider and more serious implications (and they would have lots of forms to fill out!). Seriously, I think we were told that there was some legal requirement for congressional notifications when U.S. military personnel were sent into a war zone. Joe was very embarrassed, and we were all struck by the irony of it. The National Security Council (NSC) exists in response to a real need!

Q: Hadn’t some sort of a truce been negotiated between the two parties?

GILBERT: Yes, but it was termed a “food truce.” It was important because that is what made OLS possible. But it was limited. The initial idea was that it would last six weeks or a couple of months. And the two sides weren’t obliged to cease overall hostilities, but only to respect the OLS food flights, trains and road convoys and the facilities for storing and distributing relief to needy, mostly displaced populations. Also, it’s important to realize that the “food truce” was not fool proof. There were breaches and interruptions. For example, the shooting down of the relief flight by the SAM III that the SPLA had infiltrated into a town occurred after OLS had been in operation for some time.

Q: Right.

GILBERT: Maybe this is where I should interject something that happened later on when I was in Abidjan. On my return from a vacation in the U.S., I was invited to a meeting with John Garang, the SPLA leader. He happened to be in Abidjan and a mutual acquaintance had suggested that he meet with me. I checked with Ambassador Ken Brown to make sure it was okay and to see if he had any guidance. The Ambassador said that Garang was going around trying to line up financial and political support. He said that I knew as well as anyone that we in Abidjan couldn’t deal with Garang on those issues, so I might as well meet with him and hear what was on his mind.

I didn't particularly want to meet with "Dr. John", as some call him, because, frankly - unlike some people - I had pretty ambivalent feelings about a guy who would spend so many lives and generate so much misery over the issues disputed between the SPLA and the Sudanese Government. How many lives are they worth? During my time the SPLA had spilled more donor-NGO blood than the Government, and that probably colored my view. But I did go and meet with him in his suite at the Hotel Ivoire. And I did manage to shake his hand. And I did actually have a pleasant conversation with him because he is an affable guy and an excellent raconteur. He has a Ph. D. in Agricultural Economics from Iowa State and was on the faculty of the University of Khartoum for several years. He is quite charming.

Because I didn't want to have a substantive discussion with him, I tried to keep the conversation as general as possible. Somehow I got him started telling me stories about various Sudanese personalities whom we both knew. He did tell me a lot of stories that were really amusing about people who were in high positions in the Sudanese government.

Here's one of the more interesting stories he told me: Garang had been made a Colonel in the Sudanese Army after he came in from "the bush", probably in the late 1970s. Not long afterwards he stopped overnight at the army base near Kassala on his way to a training course in Port Sudan. After freshening up, he went to the Officer's Club or Mess at about the cocktail hour. He walked up to what he thought was a steward and ordered a drink. The man bowed and went off to the bar. When the somewhat crowded room immediately went silent, Garang knew that something was amiss and that it had something to do with him. He guessed, accurately, that he had mistaken an officer in civilian dress for a servant (an easy thing since "Suffragis", or servants, usually wear the same white robes and Turbans as Sudanese male guests). He decided that the best defense was an offense. So he loudly addressed the mainly Northern officers and told them that if he had made a mistake, he was sorry. But being new, he had no way of knowing who was who so it was not fair to use his honest mistake to make him look foolish or arrogant. The "Suffragi," none other than General Burmah Nasser, handed him his drink, welcomed him to the group and apologized for his discomfort. They became good friends. That was only one of the stories he shared over our two or so hour conversation.

He had an idea that I could somehow help him with his wish that AID would provide medium-term development-oriented assistance in SPLA-controlled areas. After explaining that I had no role in deciding about such matters, I gave him a few suggestions about how his movement might make it easier for the U.S. Government to take steps in the directions he desired. For some time U.S. assistance to populations in SPLA-controlled areas has been evolving in the direction he hoped for.

I mention my conversation with John Garang mainly to illustrate that the relationship between Northerners and Southerners in Sudan is much more complex and subtle than outsiders generally suppose. I wasn't in Sudan very long before I began to realize that, despite the war between the SPLA and the government, there were lots of genuine

personal friendships that linked people on either side in genuine and significant ways. I first became aware of it when I was in the Minister of Finance' office after his return from negotiations with the SPLM. He had a stack of letters from SPLM people for friends and relatives in Khartoum. The southern leaders had been educated and had worked alongside their northern counterparts for years. There were and are still many southerners in Khartoum working for the national government, including some Ministers. Some SPLA figures certainly had extended family members in Khartoum, and I wouldn't be surprised if some had immediate family members residing in Khartoum. Something else that reflects the complexity of the conflict is that at least half of the national army, including some of the generals fighting in the South, were southerners during my time. I would be very surprised if that has changed much. I saw many examples of northern-southern personal relationships' being maintained despite the war – almost like Democrats and Republicans among us mostly succeed in not letting that difference affect their personal relations.

Q: Between northerners and southerners?

GILBERT: Yes, but particularly between rebels and government officials. It would be oversimplification to say that there is racial hatred between the two sides. I don't think that, and I never saw anything to suggest it. After all, most Northerners from the West are as African in appearance as the southerners. But I do think that northerners tend to think southerners are culturally backward – that they would be a lot better off if they were all Muslims, were sedentary herders and farmers, spoke Arabic and adopted Arab folkways. They think that southerners need to be under a kind of tutelage.

Many enlightened people wouldn't necessarily say that, but I think there are these reflexes that are built into the system. And that is essentially what the war was about. You know, it was over the extent to which the southern regions could have their own legal framework, educational system and other institutions as well as equal opportunities and equal status for southerners at the national level. It was also about increasing the South's share of national revenue, including potential oil revenue. As far as religion and religious practice was concerned, it was about the southerners gaining exemption from Sharia law in the North as well as in the South. They were already exempt from Sharia laws in the South. (I remember noticing that liquor was sold openly in retail establishments in Juba and served at official dinners at the Khartoum office of the Juba Regional Government.) The war has not been about secession except that an element among the Dinka bring it up from time to time. The rest of the southerners don't want secession because that would put them under the domination of the Dinka, who are largest tribe in the whole country. The aims for which they are all fighting, and mostly making the civilian population die, are quite complicated, even subtle. In some countries these goals would be pursued by peaceful, nonviolent methods. Before the Islamist government took over in 1989, they probably could have used nonviolent tactics without risking more than jail. But, from that standpoint, the problem for the Southerners is that they don't have much to nonviolently withhold from the northerners in order to get their way. A lot of northerners think

secession would be just fine as long as the oil fields wind up on the Khartoum side of the new border.

Q: Did you have extremists in the north? Were there extremist factions?

GILBERT: Yes, but they were just a pressure group that the moderate government had to deal with prior to the June 1989 coup. That coup represented a stealthy power grab by the Muslim Brothers who – either covertly or overtly – had been a constant force in both Egyptian and Sudanese politics. Their political party is called the National Islamic Front (NIF) and was headed by Hassan Al-Turabi. They want to establish a Muslim society under strict interpretations of Muslim law, with either no rights or very slender rights for non-Muslims to live according to non-Muslim laws and precepts. Most northern Sudanese are observant Muslims, but not fundamentalists. It is very upsetting that the NIF, whose supporters and sympathizers apparently never constituted more than about ten percent of the population, managed to gain power through this 1989 coup.

It was similar to what happened in Nazi Germany. In both countries a minority of extremists gained political control. The Sudan case was different in that the NIF came to power by a military coup whereas the Nazis gained power in Germany through a combination of electoral success and political maneuvering. There was another point of similarity as well. As previously in Germany, the Sudanese general public has generally displayed moderation. Unfortunately, they have also been politically passive like the Germans were. What political passions the Sudanese can muster are expended more on questions of personalities and loyalties than on ideas and ideology.

This coup occurred at a point when we were already beginning to plan a scaling back of development assistance. As I recall they were either in danger of falling into Brooke status or had actually done so. It had been nip and tuck for some time.

Q: How far had you gone with the planning?

GILBERT: We prepared a phase-out plan, but I can't remember whether we had done that before the coup because of Brooke or only after the coup occurred. As you know, a military coup requires termination of development assistance.

But the coup had a bizarre aspect that I should mention

Q: Which was?

GILBERT: At first the coup seemed to be just a conventional African military takeover on the part of a group within the military who simply wanted to end the drift that pervaded government and politics. Their initial pronouncements certainly sounded that way. They talked about creating order out of anarchy and making things work again. And it was plausible since the elected government couldn't seem to do much of anything, let alone anything right. Apart from the Brooke question, we were beginning to question

seriously whether we could operate a development program in the climate of lassitude that prevailed.

For a while the conventional wisdom in the diplomatic community was that the coup had been masterminded by the Egyptians in hopes that the new regime would bring the economy under improved management and negotiate an end to the war in the South. But almost immediately, Sudanese contacts of ours began to come by our offices and tell us that the coup makers were known to be Muslim Brothers. They warned us that the coup-makers' agenda was to turn the country into another Iran. These contacts were leading citizens from the University and the business community (including the head of the largest public accounting firm in the country). We in turn passed these assessments on to our Embassy. The Embassy folks basically told us that they were hearing these allegations too, but believed them to be false.

Of course, our informants turned out to be correct. I don't know how long the Embassy held to their position in their reporting to Washington, but I think it was too long. I believe our Embassy held to the incorrect view about the orientation of the military regime longer than most of the Western embassies. I remember being informally asked months after the coup for my opinion on the matter by people in AID and State in Washington who thought that the Embassy's reporting on the subject was wrong.

The only word I can say in the Embassy's defense is that the junta went to some lengths to conceal their true character. Among other things, they threw Hassan El Turabi, the leader of the NIF, in the pokey. They also appointed some southern military officers, and at least one southern civilian, to key positions. As I came to understand it later, the Egyptians had supported a coup plot. They thought they were supporting a bunch of moderate people who were going to put the country on a more businesslike track. But the Islamic Fundamentalists were so clever that, in effect, they stole the coup from the people whom the Egyptians thought they were supporting. And so the U.S. embassy was taking its assurances from the Egyptians who themselves had been bamboozled.

Q: At some point the decision was made to close out the program.

GILBERT: Once the coup occurred, no decision was needed about whether the Sudanese were irretrievably in Brooke. There was no question but that there had been a military coup, and, in that event, the law required us to end development assistance.

Q: I see. I see.

GILBERT: So for the second time in my career, I found myself directing the preparation of a phase-out plan for the development program. The humanitarian program was unaffected. This plan had a shorter time frame, and I believe it was nearly implemented by the time I left in June 1990. But, either directly or indirectly, we were still responsible for a relief effort that cost on the order of \$100 million annually.

Q: This was both emergency and program assistance and projects?

GILBERT: Even before there was any question of phase-out, our development program was declining as humanitarian assistance mounted. I believe our last development program grant was made in 1987 or early 1988. I think we had annual PL 480 Title I agreements at least through 1999. So that was Sudan.

Oh, before we leave Sudan, I should mention one thing about air transport.

Q: Didn't we have a plane in Sudan at that time?

GILBERT: Yes, that's what I wanted to add. It was clear that, as the volume of relief activity in the South expanded under OLS, there would be an increased need to fly donor and NGO staff in and out of the relief areas. OFDA had already bought an airplane for some previous emergency and offered to make it available to USAID Khartoum. Thank goodness someone warned us that it would be a major headache if we managed it, so we got UNICEF, who already operated an aircraft, to take on that responsibility. They took responsibility for operating it as a pooled resource and did an excellent job. As I recall, AirServe supplied the crew and provided the requisite maintenance.

Q: This was mainly related to relief operations?

GILBERT: Yes, only for relief use.

I feel very lucky to have had the experience working in Sudan during that period, especially now that it's over. It is one of those things that you wouldn't want to have missed, but you sure as hell wouldn't care to do it again.

Q: Right. I know exactly what you mean. Was there any lasting effect of this massive program that we had for so long out there? How would you characterize what may have become more ingrained in the...?

GILBERT: Well, I believe that it had lasting effects on the capacities and outlook of the Sudanese who were beneficiaries or otherwise associated with our programs. We provided a lot of training both in the U.S. and in-country. We trained a lot of economists. There are others whose approach to life and work will always be different because of the interactions that we had, including negotiations over things like CIP or PL480 Title I agreements, or the kind of thinking that we shared in problem-solving situations.

Joe Goodwin and Brian De Silva (a USDA PASA person) had laid out a series of policy-related studies of the economics of irrigated agriculture that involved a model. Most of the time I was there Brian was overseeing a team of ten to twenty young masters or Ph.D.-level economists who were developing and then operating this model. I think it was successful and turned out to be quite valuable on several levels. It engaged these economists in working on a practical Sudanese problem and gave them hands-on

experience in applying their training. This is only one example. The same thing happened in other sectors, such as energy sector management. One of the last things we did was work with a team of Sudanese technicians in using remote sensing to prepare land cover/bio-mass maps of Southern Kordofan and Southern Darfur.

Of course there are also a lot of people who were alive at the end of that period who wouldn't have survived without the assistance provided by the U.S. and other donors.

Q: Relief?

GILBERT: Yes. Now, I don't know how many died in later crises, but I think in general the relief programs since then have had more success because of Operation Lifeline Sudan.

Q: It established an improved institutional framework?

GILBERT: Well, yes. It also elevated the profile of the effort through the engagement of the UN system as well as the donors and NGOs at much higher levels than previously. To take one small example Audrey Hepburn made a visit in her role as special UNICEF ambassador. Mickey Leland, also a beautiful person in my opinion, made several visits to Sudan. Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter made several visits. These visits were partly emblematic of the Sudan emergency's higher profile, but they were also helpful in themselves because they energized all involved. They served to remind us that we were in the spotlight.

That was some ten years ago and relief operations in the South have continued to operate under the OLS banner ever since. Now those operations are mainly operated from Nairobi and are more than previously focused on SPLA-held territory. They have begun to incorporate primary health care, basic education and agricultural interventions as well as conventional relief. Farmers are receiving seed and inputs so that they can grow more food. Surplus food is being bought from these farmers for relief use since this is more economical than shipping it from further away. This is not a very important source of relief food, but it provides an important incentive to the farmers. These interventions have to be limited to avoid signaling support for the establishment for a new African country, but they make sense in terms of both efficiency and humanitarian criteria.

Q: But these things are being done in SPLA-controlled areas?

GILBERT: Yes, and it has had institutional development payoffs. The SPLA had a relief arm that operated in the guise of an NGO called SRRA. These guys were impossible. They were little better than a bunch of crude thugs - probably the ones whom they couldn't trust under field conditions. The relief staff who dealt with these guys in Nairobi and southern Sudan just despaired. But the SRRA has become a much better organization. I recently met some SRRA staff and was favorably impressed. The SRRA has gradually turned into an organization that the relief community can work with. Once

they have struck a bargain they can pretty much be relied upon to stick to it. Their technical capacity has increased greatly. They predicted the relief needs of 1997/98 more accurately than OLS and the donors.

It strikes me that Sudan was my only experience in a country where the U.S. presence and the U.S. assistance program were heavily linked to Cold War geo-strategic issues.

Q: Okay.

GILBERT: And I can't think of a single program that didn't come to an untimely end. It is too bad that we had to play those games. But I'm glad I witnessed one of these cases.

I mentioned that in CAR, where the leadership was about as poor as could be imagined, there were a lot of good people trying to do the right thing. I observed something similar in Sudan. There the quality of the individuals in the public service was quite high, but the overall condition of the civil and military administrations was just amazingly chaotic. Anarchy reigned.

But you know it almost reminds me of these accounts by Primo Levy and Elie Wiesel of life in concentration camps during World War II. Almost everywhere you find people who are working sincerely and diligently to do the right thing - often in situations where they get penalized for it rather than rewarded. Chaos and crisis bring out the worst in some people and the best in others.

One personality who comes to mind in this context is the Governor of Kordofan whose name I can't recall. He was instrumental in helping to get food down to the Dinka areas of southern Kordofan where large numbers of starving displaced were gathering in 1988. A donor-NGO delegation accompanied by the Governor of Kordofan flew to Babanusa in Southern Kordofan to go from there by train to Muglad and El Meiram. That was a very vivid and upsetting experience.

We had the clearance of the authorities in Khartoum. The Governor of Kordofan went with us to see the situation personally and also, I suspect, because he knew that he needed to be there to run interference. Everyone was very polite, but one didn't have to be very sensitive to realize that we weren't welcome. There was all manner of foot dragging and obfuscation by military officers and railway officials. But finally after a great deal of palaver, including some fairly stern interventions by the Governor, we managed to reach an understanding that the train would leave at something like midnight.

The Governor was from Babanusa so we went to his place for dinner before going to the train somewhat early for the departure. Most of us found comfortable places on the train, and I fell asleep. The next thing I remember is hearing voices raised in anger and noting that the train was stationary. I staggered outside to find the Governor throwing a pea green fit because the train crew had gone home and left word that they would return the next morning. The Governor personally commandeered some railway vehicles, went to the railway manager's house, and, with him reluctantly in tow, went around rousting out

the railway crew. We left several hours late, but much earlier than the train crew intended - especially since they probably didn't plan to leave at the hour they had specified. These guys had thought that they could overrule the governor of this province notwithstanding the fact that he represented the authority of the state.

Q: And they didn't want to go because of the fears of militia or were they just...?

GILBERT: Maybe the fear of the militia had something to do with it, but the militia in question were progovernment militias and you would think that they would be afraid to disobey the Governor also. Whatever it was, this kind of behavior occurred all the time. No one was indisputably in charge of anything in Sudan. Every service and administrative unit in the public sector behaved as if it were sovereign. I think it's plausible that the railway people wanted to stick to their own plans and schedules. Maybe they just didn't want to take the trip. I suppose they were aware of opposition to the trip. The army probably didn't want us down there looking into the humanitarian nightmare that they had done little to mitigate. We walked into a terrible situation there. A girl about 8 years old girl dropped dead right in front of my eyes and there were all manner of people around who looked a lot worse than she did. You knew that a lot of them were going to die of disease or outright starvation no matter how hard the international community tried to prevent it. I think all of us felt torn between staying there to lend a hand (about all we could have done was hold the hands of the afflicted) and doing what we really had to do, which was to return to Khartoum and do everything we could to engineer a more forthcoming and systematic response.

Q: And you delivered food on this train?

GILBERT: We had some food and other relief supplies with us that we were taking to the two or three NGOs who were on the scene trying to do what they could.

Q: How long a train trip was it?

GILBERT: Probably no more than a hundred miles through countryside that was supposedly in government hands, but one never quite knew. The train couldn't go very fast because the rail bed was in bad shape from the flooding and it took about eight hours. There were a lot of stops.

But for all the Sudanese who were bad actors or feckless, there were also plenty who were super good individually. I have a hard time understanding how people manage to live in a society like that. It must be pretty trying. I'm afraid they become inured to injustice, misery and plain evil on a scale far beyond any response that they can conceive. Sudanese society is extremely fragmented along ethnic, clan and family lines. This extends into the modern sector where loyalty flows to public service organizations and private sector professions and sectors that people are affiliated with. This fragmentation means that they can only form a consensus on the broadest of issues, and political action is only likely when the modern sector groups (e.g., professional associations of groups like doctors,

engineers, teachers, etc.) provide the leadership, as occurred in response to Nimeiri's excesses. It's sad that this leads most Sudanese be politically apathetic about a wide range of issues. The regime's extreme ruthlessness discourages the exercise of leadership, and apathy prevails.

Q: Well, why don't we stop there? At this point you left Sudan and were transferred to where?

A new role as Director of the USAID Regional Economic Development Service Office (REDSO) in the Ivory Coast - 1990-1993

GILBERT: To the REDSO for West and Central Africa in Abidjan.

Q: And what year was this?

GILBERT: This was summer of 1990.

Q: Well, for those who don't understand, describe a little bit about what REDSO is or was when you joined it.

GILBERT: The REDSO idea arose back in the early 1970s when David Shear was at the Senior Seminar. As part of his work there he wrote a "think piece" on how a regional office in West Africa could strengthen AID project management in the field. This led to the establishment of the first REDSO in Abidjan, and he was its first Director beginning in about 1974. REDSO stands for Regional Economic Development Services Office. It had two classic field office support functions.

One was to provide technical support both to large and fully delegated posts (or missions) and to smaller posts without full delegations. For the missions, the support usually consisted of lawyers and other highly specialized experts who are not numerous enough, or needed often enough, to be in every mission. For the smaller posts REDSO provided a much broader array of technical staff support.

The other function had to do with the non-fully-delegated posts. Posts that don't have full delegations of authority are usually headed by AID Representatives or AID Affairs Officers. In these cases, REDSO participated in major project planning and management decisions. So, when these missions had thought through what they wanted to do (often with the help of REDSO staff), the REDSO Director had to concur in the required decision. During my time in REDSO and for at least the previous ten years, approval authority for most projects was included among those authorities delegated to full missions. The principle officers of the non-fully-delegated posts could exercise the authorities delegated to full missions only with the concurrence of the REDSO Director.

A third, nonstandard function that fell to both REDSOs (the other is in Nairobi for East and Southern Africa) was direct program management. This mostly involved

responsibility for regional projects until REDSO/WCA became responsible for management of an Ivory Coast bilateral program inaugurated in FY1990.

After the phase-down in Sudan, REDSO/WCA was the largest AID management unit in Sub-Saharan Africa. I felt blessed among REDSO Directors because of my responsibility for the Ivory Coast bilateral program. This was unprecedented, and it greatly enriched my years in Abidjan.

When I arrived, I found that the REDSO wasn't performing any of its assigned functions to my satisfaction. My main concern was that there was no clear distinction between the staff responsible for supporting client posts as opposed to those responsible for direct program management. Many units and staff had responsibility for a little of each function. So, figuratively, on Tuesdays and Thursdays these people felt they were too occupied with direct program management to meet their client post support responsibilities. And on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays they couldn't do program management because they were too busy with client post support. The upshot was that nobody was really accountable for either thing. This caused us to look fickle to our client posts and sometimes we were.

Of course, some of the best staff managed somehow to meet both kinds of responsibilities. For these folks the problem was to prevent them from working themselves half to death or neglecting their families too much because of travel. But there was an essential conflict of interest in having people constantly torn between tending their own patches versus those of our clients, and I decided to resolve it.

The other thing that worried me was that, unlike REDSO/ECA (East and Southern Africa) in Nairobi, REDSO/WCA was not regarded as a particularly superior resource within its region. Others and I had observed that East and Southern Africa Missions vied with one another to secure involvement by the best REDSO/ESA staff in their program and sector strategy development work. This added strength to these functions and paid off in program quality. Although certain staff of REDSO/WCA had been in great demand from time to time, their work had been overwhelmingly project-focused and there hadn't been the kind of partnership in program conceptualization that existed between REDSO/ESA and its client bilateral posts. It seemed clear to me that we needed to recruit staff who were leaders in their fields or had the ability to achieve such standing. This problem had come up in my discussions with the Africa Bureau leadership during my pre-departure briefings, and they wanted to see REDSO/WCA's relationship with its clients evolve in the ESA direction. The recruitment of higher-powered staff in certain functions may not have arisen because that need wasn't apparent to me until I had been in Abidjan for a while.

To resolve the conflict of interest and lack of accountability problems, I got Washington's agreement to a restructuring that gave us a program management division, which was functionally like an AID Rep's office. It had responsibility for coordinating the design and implementation of all programs that REDSO was directly responsible for. Like client

posts, our Program Management Office didn't have all the staff needed for all of its functions. They were required to bid for REDSO services and were treated pretty much like the client posts at the annual scheduling conferences that we held in the fall of each year. After a few teething problems it worked quite well.

Q: Was this for Ivory Coast?

GILBERT: Yes. For the Ivory Coast bilateral program and a fairly large regional project that provided technical and institution-building assistance to the African Development Bank. We also had some responsibility for field coordination of one or two regional projects managed in Washington, and I can't remember for sure whether I left these responsibilities in the technical divisions. I think I did.

Another thing I did was to change some position descriptions and merge some functions into a single unit for synergy's sake. We combined the agriculture, environmental, Food for Peace, private sector development and economics staffs into an Office of Productive Sector Development headed by a very strong and energetic agricultural economist. This made sense to me because the vast bulk of our non-project assistance was driven by agriculture sector, agricultural and non-traditional export, private sector development and environmental policy reform agendas. We grouped the health and human resources staff into one division called the Health, Population and Human Resources Office. We also beefed up the Project Development Office and moved into that office the engineers who had previously been located in a large General Development Office.

And then, in order to get the agricultural economist mentioned above as well as other superior staff, I devoted an hour or two a day for a year or more to working with Washington colleagues in identifying strong candidates and recruiting them. There had been quite a number of vacancies when I arrived. And some of the restructuring decisions I made created new vacancies. With a good deal of help from colleagues in Washington (Merle Mukai in AFR/MGT and Cynthia Rozell, the Deputy Director of AFR/WA) we gradually brought the staff of REDSO up to full strength. I think almost anybody who knew the situation would agree that, for the most part, the new people were superior resources in their field. As a result we began to get involved more and more in the early analysis and conceptualization work that underlay sector strategy development and project selection. This meant that the quality of project ideas began to improve, and we were less often required to help make "silk purses out of sows' ears."

This was, in itself, quite satisfying. However, I never got more than backhanded praise from my "elders and betters" in Washington (who, within six months of my arrival in Abidjan, were no longer those who had selected me for the job and given me guidance). On one hand I remember mention in my EERs that I was "a total quality manager." On the other hand, I got signals that I was not paying enough attention to EEO considerations in my recruitment efforts.

Q: What was the geographic coverage?

GILBERT: REDSO/WCA's geographic coverage extends from Mauritania down to Zaire along the coast of West and Central Africa and inward to the Sahel countries, including Chad and the Central African Republic.

Q: Including some countries with little or no program, I guess.

GILBERT: Yes. And you know there are about six or seven full missions and roughly an equal number of non-fully delegated posts. That picture changed, of course, during my three plus years. The programs in Cameroon and Mauritania were phased out. And towards the end of my time, the Ivory Coast program had to be phased out beginning about when I left.

Q: Why was that?

GILBERT: There are two levels of answers to that question. The real answer, I think, is that the Ivorians were on the U.N. Security Council beginning somewhat before my arrival in Abidjan and ending about when I left. If the end of Ivory Coast's term on the Security Council wasn't enough to cause phase-out of the bilateral program, it certainly made the program vulnerable. And that's where the second level answer to your question comes in. Sometime during 1993 the new administration of AID decided that the number of country programs had to be reduced by phasing out field posts. Ivory Coast was put on that list. I frankly don't recall that any coherent, explicit reasons were given. I seem to recall that the stated reasons always pertained to the affected countries as a group. Some things that were mentioned were the desire to reduce the number of AID presence countries, to work in countries where human rights as well as democracy and governance issues were being addressed and where policy reforms were empowering and energizing the private sector. I didn't put too much credence in these rationales' explanatory power concerning the Ivory Coast decision because programs were being continued in countries where the picture in each of these areas was less positive than in Ivory Coast. The fact of Ivory Coast's relatively high per capita income was not mentioned. Another factor that wasn't mentioned was that this was yet another country that was slipping in and out of Brooke status. And there was little prospect of their staying out of Brooke without non-project assistance from the U.S. roughly equal to the annual cost of servicing their debts to the U.S. government.

Q: What about Mauritania and Cameroon?

GILBERT: Well, in Cameroon it had a lot to do with the fact that neither human rights nor democracy and governance were faring well. And, those who were close to the situation agreed that it probably had a lot to do with the fact that Brian Atwood was snubbed by the Cameroonians when he was Director of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and that body was trying to get that Government to run free and fair elections. Again, except for having the bad judgment to stiff the NDI, Cameroon was not worse in democracy-governance than a number of other African countries that continued to receive

U.S. assistance. Moreover, as a development partner, it deserved quite high marks for seriousness.

Q: And Mauritania?

GILBERT: As for the Mauritania phase-out, I think that wasn't a bad decision. Mauritania is not a real country by twentieth century standards. It's just so damn hard to do anything there. And nothing stays done for more than three weeks before it falls apart. We had a number of programs there that were good in terms of their own internal logic, but they seemed to get engulfed in the pervading futility. Implementation dragged because counterpart personnel and government priorities constantly changed. The government suffered from an organizational attention deficit disorder. In individual human beings that condition is often aggravated by hyperactivity, but the Government of Mauritania suffers from the opposite problem, "hypoactivity." So even when its attention straggled back to a particular project, action was not the likely result. Government is more or less suspended for a few weeks every year during a traditional festival of the "new dates" when most of the Moors drift back to their oases.

But our tolerance of the way things "work" in Mauritania might have gone on indefinitely if the Mauritians hadn't shot themselves in the foot during the run-up to the Gulf War by allowing Saddam Hussein to park a large part of his national air fleet there for the duration.

Q: Were there projects that you were involved in or that REDSO had a major role in during your time there?

GILBERT: Well, we were involved all across the region in providing technical and program management support to the whole gamut of the programs that the smaller posts were conducting and to a large part of the full Missions' programs. But there was significant variation among the full missions in their reliance on REDSO. The Senegal mission tended not to wish much REDSO involvement. They even contrived to get their own lawyer. Mali, Niger, Guinea and, to a lesser extent, Ghana made considerable use of REDSO services. Cameroon also did so to some extent. These larger, fully-delegated, "Schedule A" posts mainly called on us for the specialized staff which they lacked such as lawyers, engineers, private sector development specialists and environmental officers.

Our best customers remained the smaller, not-fully delegated, "Schedule B" posts like Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Benin and Cape Verde. In addition to the types of staff the Schedule A countries used, they also drew heavily on our project design officers and our sector development staff. I also should record that one of our contracting officers, Steve Wisecarver, was frequently invited to participate in design exercises. The ostensible reason was that they wanted help in preparing with contract scopes-of-work (SOWs) so that implementation would start right away following project authorization. But I eventually realized that these requests also reflected client posts' desire for his

participation in the design process. In working through the principal SOWs with the design team he usually helped them to improve the design.

Our main area of involvement in client posts' programs was in the agriculture and natural resources sector. The head of the Productive Sector Development group was Paul Crawford. He was an agricultural economist with excellent program strategy planning and design skills. Another member of that group, the Private Sector Development Advisor, Oren Whyche, was extremely capable. The two of them as well as our environmental and natural resource management specialists (an American and a Senegalese) were in great demand. The demand for help with nontraditional export development projects was so great that we recruited an Israeli expert, Shaul Horan, just to help with that.

We also provided a lot of support to countries in the area of health and family planning. Our best and most sought after technical staff members in this field were people from the region. We had a Senegalese AIDS expert who I fully expect in ten or fifteen years to hear about being in a high-level job at the World Health Organization or UNICEF.

Q: What was his name?

GILBERT: His name is Suleiman Barry. We had regional people of almost equal caliber as economists, educationists, environmentalists, engineers, and primary health services experts. Suleiman Barry was the most sought, but the regionals were at least as sought after as their American counterparts. And the credit goes to Chuck De Bose. When he was the head of the General Development Office he spent a lot of time before my arrival identifying and recruiting these folks. We continued the process after he left, but we only had a very few positions left to fill.

Q: Wasn't De Bose also your Health Officer?

GILBERT: Yes. He was a Health Officer by profession, and functioned in that capacity while also heading up the General Development Office. Though he found and recruited most of the regional staff, I feel a sense of shared accomplishment regarding the key role they came to play. When they first came on board they were slow to appreciate the role we intended for them. I'm sure that Chuck or others never gave them to understand that their role was to be one of simply doing as they were told. But they acted as if this were the case. They came from professional and administrative environments where initiatives, ideas and, above all, decisions flowed down and where such things were not open to a much discussion, let alone to being questioned.

We held a lot of technical review meetings for the purpose of framing REDSO positions on project design, authorization and major implementation decisions that were submitted for my concurrence. Given the number of countries and the complexities involved there was no way we could do this responsibly without making this a staff-work process under the coordination of the head of the Project Development and Engineering Office subject to final review by the Deputy Director and myself. Full participation of the concerned

technical staff was essential to reaching sound decisions. We seldom, if ever, said “No” in the end, but we often required changes in order to concur.

As you know, meetings of this type can get pretty lively and ours were no exception. We insisted that these folks attend meetings on matters in their technical areas even though at the beginning they often had little prior exposure to the specific activity under review. After discussions went back and forth for a time on the various points, we would ask them what they thought. Initially, they were almost always shocked into speechlessness. Once they knew what to expect, they were merely resigned and miserable at the prospect. In their earliest responses, they would initially agree with what others or the senior person present had last said. But gradually they observed that everyone was more or less equal in these discussions or, at least, that staff didn't particularly hesitate to differ with their seniors, including me, on points of fact or interpretation - even outside their particular specialties. We also insisted that they join in calling us by our first names and be called by theirs (not an easy thing for Francophones). At the end of the meetings they could see that the senior person present would formulate a recommended decision that may or not be based on a consensus and that the differences in the meeting seldom affected relationships outside the meeting. They saw that the senior officers generally accepted well-reasoned recommendations of the staff, and that if we didn't we would explain why.

Finally, through a process that combined pushing and handholding we got them to function as regular members of the REDSO staff. The process of getting there was fun to watch. The underlying change in mental posture helped them to succeed in practicing their specialties on their own at client posts.

Oren Whyche, our senior private sector advisor, spoke wonderful French. She had held a number of professional positions in the U.S. banking sector, but one of her more formative experiences was working as a Zaire Airlines stewardess for some years. She had lived in Africa on and off for years. Needless to say, she knew her way around. In addition, she was a dazzlingly smart and articulate expert person with an extremely positive personality and an incredible work ethic. She became the primary media personality not only in REDSO, but in the whole U.S. Mission. She was frequently in demand to appear on television and radio to explain how private sector economies worked as well as the care and feeding they required. About every six or nine months she would become physically exhausted and have to kind of drop her frenetic schedule for a week or so. We tried to get her to take it a bit easier and succeeded to some extent, but we couldn't “just say no” for her against her will and without her cooperation. We had similar problems, but to a lesser degree, with our strongest staff members.

While REDSO Director, I was mindful of some dangerous tendencies that we had to avoid. One important one, to which REDSO had sometimes fallen prey in the past, was to consider itself mandated to micromanage or impose program decisions on the Schedule B posts. Even though it had been some years since I had witnessed or heard of a REDSO Director taking that kind of approach, I was on guard to prevent this kind of thinking from creeping into REDSO's work and communications with the client posts. The

philosophy that I preached at regular intervals to my colleagues was that we were not there to ensure that each post's decisions were the same that we would make. Rather a REDSO concurrence should reflect our finding that a referred decision was defensible in light of USAID policy and regulations; of economic, social and technical soundness criteria; and of the relevant legislative framework.

We did more than apply “stink” tests. But, in our efforts to achieve high quality decisions, we bore in mind that there is usually more than one decision that a reasonable person can make on a given matter. We focused our thinking on parameters and degrees of acceptability. When we sent comments back to the client post we would explain the changes we recommended and distinguish them from those that we required in order to concur.

My concept was that REDSO's mission was both to ensure a “requisite quality” of program decision-making and to apply our resources to raising the attained quality as high as possible. But we couldn't do the latter by constantly jerking the client posts around. Instead it had to be our aim to build partnerships with these posts so that we could make our inputs throughout the process of developing and implementing activities.

Part of that strategy was to assure that our people were leaders in their fields as well as disciplined and service-oriented in their work with the client posts. Another was to let the REDSO review process be fairly transparent so that they could see that it was a staff process rather than just me substituting my judgment for that of the client principal officer. The payoff was that we had increasingly productive working relations with the client posts. When we occasionally disagreed, the quality of our disagreements was quite high.

Q: Were there any particular program or development policy directions that you were responsible for or were asked to pursue or promote?

GILBERT: None, except to make sure that programs were developed and managed along sound lines. All of us in the region received the same guidance about policy and program priorities, including the new initiatives. Democratization and governance was one thrust that was getting great emphasis. Two others were nontraditional export promotion and HIV/AIDS. We added experts to our staff in each of these three areas. But I didn't see myself as some kind of Pope or Moses to serve as (and be seen as posing as) shepherd of the WCA flock. I'm sorry to say that my Deputy used to search through everything that came out of Washington for policy trends or shifts that might provide us an opportunity to “exercise leadership” on some issue or initiative. The ideas he came up with seemed pretty lame to me. I came down on that like a ton of bricks. It raises my hackles just to think about it even now. Without a compelling need, this would have amounted to role seeking or, more bluntly, posturing. It would also have impaired our working relations with our client posts.

My view was that our leadership role was to be “apostles” of USAID professionalism and that our job was to encourage and promote it through helping the client posts in the region realize their programmatic visions. This meant supplying specialized manpower and, for the Schedule B posts, participating in technical and program managerial decision-making. As the quality of our staff increased we would become increasingly involved in strategy development and project selection. But that would not happen if we were perceived as trying to make ourselves look good at our clients’ expense – with us as leaders and innovators and them as less enlightened followers. Besides that would have been unfair to the leadership of the client posts. Generally, they were our equals in most ways except that they lacked staff resources and, especially, the specialized or highly experienced and trained staff that REDSO had.

But we did some things that nobody asked of us. We stuck like flypaper to the Liberian humanitarian emergency. We monitored not only the emergency but also the assistance that went to Liberia and to the refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone located in neighboring countries of Guinea and Ivory Coast. And again, even though we were occasionally asked to take certain actions in relation to those situations, we never got any encouragement to monitor that situation or thanks for doing so. But some of our staff and I had been involved in other emergency situations and knew damn well that if the Liberia emergency program and related refugee programs went south, people would murmur their dismay that REDSO had let that happen.

Q: What were the major issues that you had to deal with? What did you see as your biggest problems and opportunities? I guess you have touched on them to some extent.

GILBERT: Well, one special role for REDSO was non-explicit. The concern I felt about keeping in touch with the Liberia and related emergencies was not just based on my experience in past emergencies, but also on my observation that we were just expected to be in touch with what was going on in the region both in the bilateral AID posts and in various regional institutions. So we encouraged staff to pay courtesy calls on the secretariats of these bodies. Keeping in touch with the atmosphere and organizational health of client posts was pretty easy regarding the Schedule B posts, but harder where the Schedule A posts were concerned. Doing so depended in part on my also getting around to client posts from time to time. I didn’t need Washington’s permission to travel but I did need post clearances. Of course, this was most difficult to get from posts with problems because these would, as often as not, be associated with a touch of paranoia on the part of a principal officer who felt “beleaguered.” My approach was consistent with discussions I had with the Africa Bureau leadership that had been in place when I was en route to Abidjan. I made a point of getting around to as many posts as possible on a more or less routine basis.

Q: Were you supposed to report back to Washington?

GILBERT: Not formally. I would usually tie visits to something interesting and innovative that was going on at one or more posts. I would sometimes do a little report on

the activity or event for Washington and the other WCA posts. I felt that this was useful because it was always nicer for the client posts if someone else tooted their horn, and weak Ambassadors are sometimes disinclined to recognize or even understand really creative contributions by AID staff. Other times I would simply write an informal letter or note either to the principal officer or the DAA giving a perspective on the work a client post was doing. I very seldom “carried tales.” When I did it was about situations where a problem could result in serious consequences. At any post there is usually something to gossip about, but I don’t recall learning of more than two or three untoward situations that I thought should be communicated to anyone in Washington. Part of my reasoning was that bad news travels fast and there was no particular reason for me to assume any but a very few situations would not get back to the geographic office in rather short order. However, I occasionally got calls from Washington asking me what I knew or thought about a given situation. Hopefully, I was able to offer some insights and give added perspective on those occasions.

Q: Did you have a problem maintaining morale given that people had to be traveling so much?

GILBERT: Morale needs attention at any Foreign Service post, but the REDSOs in both Abidjan and Nairobi had a history of problems in that area. REDSO duty is likely to be hard on all the staff involved in servicing client posts. It is particularly hard on mediocre or weak staff. A REDSO assignment requires staff to be “under the gun” much of the time. Some people thrive on deadlines and having to make written and/or verbal recommendations that realistically addressed concrete problems, but others can’t do it or can’t sustain it. A number of people who couldn’t deal with that kind of pressure engaged in evasive behavior. One ploy was to make arrangements for client posts to request them for well or thinly disguised routine tasks. Another was to find reasons for not traveling. Of course, some of our staff just weren’t in much demand. REDSO duty was also difficult on people with fragile family situations or who didn’t cope well with travel.

Client posts were asked to report on the contributions made by REDSO staff. For most of our staff, this made up the bulk of the content of their annual PERs. So morale was poor among the 10 or so percent of our staff who couldn’t or wouldn’t deliver. For the staff who could handle the travel, whose family situations didn’t pose a problem, who performed well and who were in high demand, REDSO tours offered professional fulfillment and advanced their careers. But even for this group REDSO duty posed problems arising from scheduling pressures, the challenge of achieving a reasonable balance between their professional and family responsibilities and the need for a modicum of rest and relaxation.

Both Nairobi and Abidjan, being big cosmopolitan cities with all manner of diversions for those who could cope, were in themselves hazards to morale. The reason is that those who were comfortable with the cross-cultural setting would pretty much go their own ways. This meant that the kinds of community activities, including reciprocal home

entertaining, that brought people together at more challenging posts were either absent or under-subscribed.

At the beginning, morale in some circles within REDSO was pretty low. And, as I began to clarify roles and responsibilities on one hand and break up various little unbusinesslike arrangements on the other, it got worse for a time. Some people cleared out, which was just fine if they couldn't "get with the program." But, before long, morale began to improve. I encouraged managers to stay in touch with the families of people who were traveling and would try myself to do this where I saw a need. I made a point of entertaining the staff at our house and organizing get-togethers for both employees and family members whenever the least excuse presented itself. This eventually led to more and more community activity that we didn't initiate. Jane and I made a point of never turning down invitations unless we had no choice. That could be pretty taxing sometimes, but we had both learned the art of the power nap.

We were also really fortunate that the Ambassador, Ken Brown, and his DCM, Gerry Hamilton, were determined to do everything they could to promote a sense of community within the larger U.S. Mission. A lot of Embassy staff had regional responsibilities also and faced the same challenges to morale. Apart from being extremely approachable and friendly, Brown and Hamilton communicated by every word, look and gesture that they considered all of us – direct-hires and contractors – to be part of one official family. One very concrete thing they did was insist that USAID and other agencies represented at post be given the same treatment as State Department staff in the assignment of housing and the provision of GSO services.

I mentioned the ten or twelve high-powered regional technical staff who were in such demand by client posts, but in addition to them we had lots regional professionals in the West Africa Accounting Center (WAAC) and some in the Executive Office of REDSO. We made a point of encouraging these people to attend REDSO community social events. Their lives being more complicated, they attended at a much lower rate than the U.S. staff. However, the social barrier decreased markedly through time. One thing that greatly helped was that one of the WAAC staff ran a small establishment called "Chez Willy's." A lot of the singles – both American and regional – would go there for beer and snacks after work. Willy, like many in the WAAC, was a Ghanaian.

I believe that within about six months of my arrival morale was quite good and that it stayed that way throughout the remainder of my time in Abidjan.

Ivory Coast

Q: Well, you were Mission Director, so to speak, for the Ivory Coast. What were we trying to do in Ivory Coast?

GILBERT: The largest item was an ESF cash grant for debt repayment designed to keep them out of Brooke status. They had been on the brink of going into Brooke for some time.

Q: You mean we were giving them a grant to pay off their debt?

GILBERT: That's right. Much of the rationalization was based on the steps they were taking toward economic reform.

Q: This was part of a World Bank reform program?

GILBERT: Yes. The World Bank was working with them on rehabilitating the coffee and cocoa sectors. The program included opening up agricultural markets, de-confining input markets, etc. We were not involved in that dialogue, nor did we even track it systematically.

Q: It was just a cash transfer? There was no commodity import or anything?

GILBERT: No. My understanding was that (except perhaps in the most unusual circumstances, e.g. the Israel cash grant, for instance) it is important to establish for the record that the cash grant was used for something that the U.S. supports. If for no other reason, this has the benefit of dispelling possible claims by critics that the funds supported host government spending of a frivolous or repressive character. Servicing of debts to the U.S. government was what we wanted the Government to use the money for and it served a purpose – albeit a political more than an economic one, but remember these were ESF funds.

Q: That wasn't illegal?

GILBERT: Well, I was pretty surprised at the whole idea. I don't think I would have had the nerve to suggest it myself. But this is a reminder that dubious is one thing and illegal is another. I can't remember whether it was authorized in Washington or in Abidjan, but the lawyers were fully involved both in Washington and in Abidjan. It was notified to Congress. Negotiating it with the Government was one of the first things I did.

Q: Did this generate counterpart?

GILBERT: No.

Q: You didn't even ask for counterpart?

GILBERT: No. That was one of the first things I thought of when I heard of the idea. By then I had acquired a lot of experience in programming counterpart and U.S.-owned local currencies. We were planning to launch one or two technical assistance projects and entré into the Ivorian development budget allocation process would have been helpful. But AID/W had thought that through and was dead set against it. They wanted the cash grant

to be quickly disbursed and done with. But it wasn't just a matter of their view of the Ivory Coast cash grant. There had been a rethinking of counterpart funding issues following a finding by some entity – probably GAO - that AID must take more accounting responsibility for counterpart currencies than it wanted. Also, I think AID/Washington had been exasperated to find in several cases that their intent of scaling back field operations and activities by cutting appropriated budgets had been frustrated in cases where posts had substantial U.S.-owned and counterpart currencies.)

Before going on, let me note that we planned to make additional cash grants in FYs 1991 and 1992 in amounts similar to the \$7 to 10 million that we provided in 1990. I think we did so in 1991, but I'm pretty sure we didn't in 1992.

We developed two bilateral projects also. One was a health and family planning program that was pretty ambitious. It was budgeted at something like seven or eight million dollars over a number of years. One component expanded the availability of family planning services in key locations around the country. Though typically located in health facilities, the services provided were mostly straightforward, "bare-naked" contraception. There was tacit support for doing this, but I don't believe there was an explicit family planning or population policy. We implemented this program through a grant to the premier Ivorian private family planning NGO called AIBEF (Ivorian Association for Family Well-Being). From the time we authorized that project until we could get that outfit "certified", we spent a fair amount of money for, and devoted at least six months to, financial management technical assistance and training provided by a big eight accounting firm before their management systems and professional staffing were judged adequate to manage the funds that they would be receiving from us. Within about 90 days of our providing the certification that enabled us to begin disbursing the grant, two of their accountants ran off with a substantial pile of money (maybe \$40,000). Of course, the certification was technically correct. Adequate financial controls don't prevent embezzlement; they merely discourage it by making it difficult to hide for any length of time. But this was discouraging, and it slowed project implementation considerably. It also illustrates one of the reasons why it is difficult for AID to support local NGOs directly. Most simply can't meet financial certification requirements. That's why AID often makes grants to them through American PVOs.

Q: Was it an effective program?

GILBERT: Well, it was on the way to being effective. I don't think there was any question of the demand for the services, and meeting that demand was pretty straightforward business. Given the supplies, there were plenty of Ivorian doctors, nurses and midwives who were capable of delivering the services. I think it would have eventually turned out to be an effective program. But it never got fully up and running before I left at the end of 1993.

There was also an HIV/AIDS control element to this project. It operated through another local NGO called ESPOIR (Hope). It operated an HIV testing and counseling center.

There was an Ivorian nurse or doctor who ran its day-to-day operations. There were also some Belgian nuns who contributed. One of the nuns was HIV positive due to a blood transfusion. These were saintly people who did a great deal of good in getting people to guard against HIV or, if they had it, to protect others from catching it from them. Another part of the combined anti-HIV/family planning project was a social marketing of condoms activity run by PSI (Population Services International). They did an excellent job of increasing the availability and use of condoms. One element of their promotion operation was a troupe of actors who put on ribald comedy skits to put their AIDS prevention message across. For this they managed to hire a dwarf who had a national following as a comedian as well as a tallish, rather plump woman who played his wife in domestic skits centering on his puffed up male vanity and his constant philandering. Their skits were side-splittingly funny.

After the comedy part the young American woman who was PSI's publicity manager give a demonstration on the proper application of a condom using a banana – which was a little funny, but definitely got the message across. This was followed by a question and answer session. The time I was there as guest of honor, one fairly wispy little man in the audience said that he agreed on the importance of safe sex, but was worried about the size of the condoms. Weren't there larger ones than the one she used in the demonstration? The reactions among the other men in the audience ranged from eye rolling to expressions of shared concern. This prompted the presenter, maintaining a perfectly straight face, to demonstrate how stretchy condoms are. Afterwards I told the American lady that the ringer in the audience was a nice touch. She said he wasn't a ringer and that they got one such questioner just about every time they put on the show. I should point out that these shows had a broad appeal, but the audiences were usually drawn more from the skilled and semiskilled urban workforce than from the middle class or the elite.

Q: I see.

GILBERT: It was my understanding that, following phase out of the Ivory Coast bilateral program, these family planning and the HIV/AIDS activities were to be subsumed under one or more REDSO-managed regional programs. I'm not sure how this worked out.

One of the pleasures of running the health and family planning project was working with the Minister of Health at that time. He was really a super guy. He was, of all things, a cardiologist. And this gives you an idea of how things sometimes work in that part of the world, no less - and maybe even worse - in Ivory Coast than in neighboring countries. Dr. Alain Ekra was the director of the national cardiology institute before he was appointed Minister of Health. He had superb training and was a thoroughgoing gentleman. It was said that he wept when told of his assignment as Minister of Health. He loved his work and his institute, and he had no background in public health. The word was that this seemingly illogical change came about because one of President Houphouet-Boigny's nephews was Ekra's deputy at the institute. The President wanted the nephew to be the man in charge. The President was understood to have a serious heart condition. He apparently must have supposed that it was more important to be in the care of a relative

than in the care of the better qualified and more senior man. So if that was his premise, his action was quite logical.

Q: Yes.

GILBERT: Anyway Dr. Ekra really was a dream to work with. Early in our working relationship we presented him with a preliminary description of the activities that we thought made sense in the fields of Family Planning and HIV/AIDS control. He said that our thinking was on target, but it would be impossible to accomplish our aims by working within the government health sector. However, he was willing to sign a master project agreement that obligated funds for a broadly described set of purposes to be achieved through grants to the two Ivorian NGOs that both parties agreed were appropriate for the purposes. Based on my previous experience, this pragmatic and courageous act placed him in a class by himself among Ministers of Health. His willingness to do this may have been in large part a function of his not being part of the public health fraternity. To them, he had to be a traitor to his constituency.

We also had a regional secondary city urban development project with an Ivory Coast component. As I recall, bilateral funds were used to buy into the regional project to support the Ivory Coast component. Abidjan had for many years hosted an AID Regional Housing and Urban Development Office (RHUDO). Reduced in size, it was absorbed into REDSO about halfway through my three years in REDSO. There was a lot of bilateral donor coordination in the municipal and decentralized development field in Ivory Coast. The responsible RHUDO/REDSO staff were excellent technicians and played a leading role in developing the ideas that other donors and AID collaborated in supporting.

Q: Wasn't there a major AID housing project in the Abidjan area?

GILBERT: Yes. There were several that had been completed by that time. We took people to see them, but they were no longer active as AID projects.

Q: They had worked out well?

GILBERT: Yes. But they were big, full-blown sites and services and/or low cost housing guaranty projects.

The efforts during my time were focused on secondary cities or towns. An important contextual factor was the push in Ivory Coast and some other countries in the region to decentralize development responsibility and devolve increased financial authorities on rural districts and incorporated towns. Unfortunately, this was not done for the best of reasons – only the most necessary. The national governments' recognition of the benefits of this approach coincided with their recognition that they could no longer finance the operating costs of these entities from the center. So one of the major thrusts of the project was training municipal staff in the new thinking and the new skills that were required of them. It also provided technical assistance in tax base development. This largely involved

cadastral surveys to classify land holdings and determine ownership. Another thrust involved exploring prospects for privatization of municipal services and supporting limited experiments along that line. I don't recall that we had time to proceed very far with that aspect, however. Here again, when phase-out was in clear prospect, we sought to continue the Ivory Coast activity under a continuing regional project that would extend some of its thrusts to the other countries in the region.

Q: You were doing this throughout the region?

GILBERT: Well, the Ivory Coast bilateral element of the program had funding for actual implementation. I believe the region-wide element was basically for training and for very little, if any, technical assistance for implementation.

Q: What about the relations with the African Development Bank? Did you have a project with them?

GILBERT: Yes, we did.

Q: What were we supposed to do there?

GILBERT: It was a very complicated project. But we were mainly providing funds for them to use for technical assistance in the development of sector programs and projects. Wayne King was the project manager until he left to become AID Affairs Officer in Kinshasa. I'm pretty sure that the AFDB did the contracting for most of the technical assistance with our concurrence and was reimbursed afterward with project funds. Decisions about technical services to be provided under the project were governed by rigorous criteria and procedures that the AFDB - or, occasionally, someone on our side - had to observe whenever they proposed to use the project's resources. The idea was to discipline the process and discourage individuals on either side from thinking of the project as a slush fund.

The African Development Bank is a serious institution in the sense that it is full of a lot of capable people, including some who are quite impressive. However, because the people and the units aren't very good at cooperating with one another, it doesn't really perform at anywhere near its potential capacity.

Q: It is quite thoroughly Africanized, right?

GILBERT: Yes. There were only a very few non-African (called "non-regional") staff, and they were in highly specialized functions.

Most of the staff are highly qualified and, as far as I was able to observe, quite effective at both the working and policy levels. However, the management culture leaves a good deal to be desired. In general, there is too little horizontal integration or coordination. But the really bad news is that the larger management units are vertically integrated in the

extreme. I have heard more than one person associated with the AFDB say that it functions like a big African village wherein there is almost no delegation of authority and the smallest matters are referred to the chief, in council, for a decision. People may come together to discuss common problems and reach a consensus but the chief is involved in surprisingly routine matters that could be safely left to the discretion people well down in the organization.

Another reason for all the “drill” associated with implementation of the AFDB project was to assure that procurement was competitive and transparent. Many of the rules they had to follow were dictated by U.S. procurement precepts. We regarded this both a safeguard and an element of the technical assistance provided through the project.

Q: Did this cause much chafing?

GILBERT: They didn't complain too much. For some, that may have reflected their recognition of its futility. But most seemed to see the value of the procedures. They saw that there was very little arbitrariness in the workings of the project and that all had to follow the same rules of the road. I imagine many kind of liked that. Every once in a while, one of the higher ups in the Bank would seek a commitment from me or my Deputy or Wayne King to move forward with something of “very special” importance, and we simply answered that there was an established process that we weren't free to suspend and that the idea would have to be handled on its merits as judged by the “committee.” That did little to enhance my standing or “coziness” with the top management of the AFDB, but I have never set much store on seeking anything more than correct and mutually respectful relations with host government or cooperating institution officials. I've never found that approach to prevent development of genuinely warm friendships with the truly good people on the other side. Most of our AFDB colleagues seemed to appreciate being part of something transparent and structured enough to protect them from questions of impropriety.

However, the complexity of the project became a millstone around our neck when we received the report of a midterm evaluation that had been carried before my arrival by a Robert Nathan Associates team led by Irv Rosenthal. As I recall that report found that many of the technical assistance packages delivered under the project had too little or no connection with the outputs and end-of-project status (EOPS) indicators that had been established in the project agreement. The AFDB's response, after a very long delay, was to send a heated and very lengthy rebuttal in which they took issue with every jot and tittle of the report. Wayne sided with them, so we largely endorsed the Bank response and sent it back to Nathan Associates.

Q: But we were financing studies?

GILBERT: Yes, studies, technical assistance and on-site training – all carried out by consultants.

Q: Not long-term technical assistance.

GILBERT: There were a few American staff, and we didn't finance them. As I recall our financing was limited to technical assistance of no more than six months' duration.

The Nathan people replied in the spirit of the AFDB rejoinder. I can't remember how we settled the matter. It was a mess because Nathan Associates couldn't get their final payment until their report was accepted. Recriminations went back and forth for at least 18 months after the first draft of the AFDB's first rejoinder was received. I'm surely confessing to a failure but no one but Wayne King could get their mind around the complexities of the interchanges between the Bank and Nathan Associates. I think it was only after Wayne left Abidjan that we were able to settle the matter by paying Nathan Associates but not distributing the finalized report. When we designed a follow-on project we made sure that it focused on only two sectors: private enterprise development and environmental management.

Q: Well, any other dimensions? What was your sense of the region?

GILBERT: Let me just speak about two other things that I did. One involved Nigeria and the other Mauritania. I was placed in charge of the AID programs in both countries for quite long periods because of vacancies in the top jobs. I was formally named Acting AID Representative in Mauritania for probably a year or so. For Nigeria I was only an Acting AID Affairs Officer. There is an instructive story behind the difference in the two titles. Let me say something about the Nigeria case first. It was a vivid experience. I had to go there twice.

Brief stints as Acting AID Affairs Officer in Nigeria and Acting AID Representative in Mauritania

Q: What were we doing there?

GILBERT: AID was running a family planning and child survival program that was, I believe, supported both by bilateral and regional projects. During my time of involvement the main activity was the Family Health Services project. It funded at least five or six sub-activities that dealt with such needs as provision of public and private sector family planning and primary health services; training of health professionals in the provision of family planning services and primary care; public health education; family planning advertizing and publicity; commercial and public sector distribution of family planning supplies; a separate program for social marketing of contraceptives, etc. A separate contractor implemented each of these sub-activities, and one contractor was responsible for providing common logistical and administrative support for all the contractors. On top of that there was an overall coordinator of all these lash-ups who was, I believe, a personal services contractor (PSC). The budget for Nigeria during this time ran about \$7 to 10 million.

I think there were only two direct-hire professional USAID positions in Lagos. One was for a Program Officer and the other was for an AID Affairs Officer. There may also have been a USDH secretarial position.

This was a very unusual set-up. I often wondered about the reason for having such a small USDH staff to manage such a large effort. This is largely explained by a bizarre tug of war between AID and State over desirable residential property on Ikoyi Island. The former Mission Director's house was owned by AID. When AID had phased down its USDH numbers to the point that the assignment of a senior AID officer to Lagos could no longer be justified, the decision was made to allow State to borrow or lease the Mission Director's residence. State promptly made it the residence for the DCM. For a time, most of the USAID officers posted to Lagos to oversee the remaining small program were distinctly middle level, but as the program became more and more large and complex, increasingly senior AID officers were assigned to Lagos as AID principle officer. This process culminated in the assignment of Gene Chiavaroli to replace Hank Merrill. Gene was a Minister-Counselor and yet the title remained AID Affairs Officer. I was told that State insisted on this because, AID Affairs Officers are not entitled to representational housing, whereas Mission Directors and AID Reps are. By keeping the representational profile of USAID down, they were preventing AID from justifying a request that the DCM's house be returned for the use of the AID principle officer's use. I'm told that State refused to discuss the situation. I made a small effort to draw the DCM (who was a good friend from graduate school days) on the subject, and got nowhere.

Q: This is illustrative of the competitiveness between agencies and control of property and rights.

GILBERT: It also helps one to understand why the administrative management professionals in the Africa Bureau and in the central management bureau of AID were dead set against committing to an AID phase-out in Tanzania when it was inevitable that the Tanzanians would embrace policy reform (because they had no other choice) and that AID would be required to reactivate its program and reacquire housing and other real estate. But the people who insisted on the phase-out in Tanzania were not interested in pragmatic considerations like these. For them it was a matter of acting out a political message.

Anyway, I had never seen the likes of the AID operation in Lagos. There were two USDH professionals who were responsible for overall management of an amazing conglomeration of contractors and PVOs that were operating a far-flung and complex program. These two direct-hire officers sat in the Embassy while the PSC coordinator and all the Chiefs of Party/managers of the contracts for components of the AID program sat in a separate building several miles away. I believe it was located on Ikoyi Island while the Embassy was, by then, located on Victoria Island. With the traffic in Lagos, one did not lightly undertake to drive from either location to the other. It could take 20-30 minutes or, just as likely, half the day.

Hank Merrill preceded Gene in that job. He had decided that it made sense to consolidate the contract and USDH managers in one building. And he was dead right. It was more important for the AID officers to be close to those operations than to be sitting in the Embassy next to the Ambassador and the other members of the country team. The vulnerabilities of such a highly leveraged program management structure were great enough without this separation of the direct-hire from the contract managers. Also, the Embassy staff was growing and the Administrative Officer of the Embassy had told Hank that it wouldn't be long before he and the Program Officer would have to find office space elsewhere.

So Hank had negotiated with the landlord of the building that housed the AID contractors to expand the building so that it would provide office space for him and the Program Officer plus some space for other purposes. AID wouldn't finance the expansion, but would sign a contract setting forth the terms on which the expanded space would be leased. But then, before the agreement (which had received REDSO legal clearance), was signed, Hank got sick and had to be medically evacuated. After he had been gone for several weeks, or maybe even a couple of months, it became clear that he could not return. Gene was selected as his replacement, but couldn't be released from his duties as Deputy Assistant Administrator in the scientific and technical bureau for many months. So I was appointed Acting AID Affairs Officer for the interim.

After a few weeks, I decided that I had better go over to Lagos to get acquainted with my new responsibilities and the staff there. When I did so, I found that the agreement had not been signed and the expansion project was hanging fire because the PSC Coordinator was attacking the lease agreement. He claimed that the terms were too expensive and, if consolidation had to occur, that less expensive premises could be obtained. The contract chiefs of party largely endorsed this argument. Next, the Ambassador said that there was no reason why new AID Affairs Officer and the Program Officer – or even additional people – could not be accommodated in the Embassy. Meanwhile, the landlord was saying that he was going to increase the rent for the existing space to the amount that would be paid per unit after the expansion, and that unless we signed a new lease agreement for either the same or expanded space rather quickly, he would get other tenants. This was an entirely plausible threat.

All this was extremely annoying. It was clear to me that the PSC Coordinator and the contract Chiefs of Party simply preferred not to be collocated with the AID principal officer. It was equally clear to me the Ambassador, who had a reputation for taking a very close interest in and freely offering “guidance” on day-to-day AID operations simply wanted to continue in that vein. I also knew that his tour would end within a year or eighteen months and that the Administrative Officer, who would not state his position on the record, would have his way then if not sooner. One option would have been to simply sign the lease agreement and let the PSC Coordinator, the Chiefs of Party and the Ambassador lump it. But that wouldn't do because I knew that AID Administrator Roskens and Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan would be visiting Lagos in the near future – following a visit to Abidjan, in fact. If I just did what I knew

was the right thing, these two visitors would get an ear full about my “irresponsible and wasteful” decision. I also had little hope that Roskens knew or cared much about AID management precepts or the downside of having an Ambassador over-involved in running an AID program. I also knew that I didn’t want to use his visit to Abidjan to bend his ear about anything as mundane as the Lagos office space issue. I’m sure he would have thought I was nuts if I did that.

So, after returning and trying for a week or so to resolve the issues from Abidjan, I realized that those closest to the scene could always keep raising new options and kicking up sand. So I decided to tie it up so tight it couldn’t wiggle. I took a team to Lagos to identify and check out the alleged options and to analyze the financial as well as other implications of each. The team consisted of a lawyer, a financial analyst and an engineer. We found some office space that was cheaper but it had serious drawbacks that would cost significant amounts to remedy. Other office space that was equal or superior was usually more expensive or not verifiably available within our timeframe. We talked to the Embassy Administrative Officer, and he said that the Ambassador’s position on the office space issue was unrealistic since it would force him to locate officers serving classic embassy functions (political, economics, military, labor) in offices physically apart from their colleagues. The Administrative Office staff was already located in an annex. And, “no”, he would not put his position in writing, because he could not contradict the Ambassador. My very good friend the DCM knew what was afoot and why, but did not wish to take cognizance of the inconsistency between the Ambassador’s position and the reality of the Embassy’s space problems. Knowing the Ambassador, I sympathized.

So, on the last day of our three-day visit to Lagos, I went in and made a presentation to the Ambassador, the DCM and, I believe, the Administrative Officer. Based on the work of my colleagues, I laboriously laid out the facts and their implications. Without referring to the fact that the alternative of keeping the two AID direct-hire officers in the Embassy was essentially a false one, I proved that the cost-effective solution was to sign the lease agreement for the expanded, consolidated AID office space. The Ambassador shrugged his shoulders and said “OK, but you can continue to use the Embassy space if you wish.” I thanked him for his kindness and left.

Q: Why do you think he was so keen on having you in the embassy?

GILBERT: Well, because he was used to participating rather directly in the administration of the AID program.

I think the Embassy side of this episode – especially the walking on eggs within the Embassy – was mainly a matter of that particular Ambassador’s personality, but it also reminds me of and partly illustrates something I’ve noticed about the difference in the administrative cultures of embassies and USAID missions.

Debate and dialogue are essential to the program planning and management processes in AID, and a typical AID mission’s decision-making process is characterized by the

operation of checks and balances. As a governance structure it is essentially republican in character. The principle officer has certain authorities, but they must be exercised with the advice and concurrence of others. These others know that it is their job to take issue with proposed decisions that cannot be brought into accord with the precepts to which their functional responsibilities bind them.

Most embassies that I have observed – and there have been quite a few – operate something like royal courts with the ambassador in the role of the king or queen. As such, he or she is surrounded by people whose role is to provide advice as well as perform their specialized functions as political and economic reporting, etc. But their advice is not binding, and, on average, it is offered with much more circumspection than one would expect in an AID setting. Ambassadors are to be addressed as Mr. or Madame Ambassador, and it is expected that one rises when, as the President's representative, they enter a room.

And it often seemed to me that in Embassy meetings there was a good deal of trafficking in shared verities that, when invoked, were usually preceded by the words "Of course, ...". I noticed that in reporting cables, either by conviction or due to the need to maintain credibility, positive news items or favorable interpretations of trends or events were almost invariably followed by a pessimistic statement or prognostication. Though often born of a horror of being open to a charge of "localitis" and, occasionally, of the actual convictions of the reporting officer (especially among officers doing their obligatory "African tour"), I believe these predictable "negatives" also reflected a need to pay obeisance to a State Department culture of Afro-pessimism or, perhaps, global pessimism. But that is the default setting. Sometimes it is required to uphold some particular optimism. In my opinion, it is because of these strictures that there is a lot of concern in State Department circles about dissent channels and awards for people who have suffered for their frankness or, in effect, for "speaking truth to power."

In dealing with Embassies or State Department geographic offices, I remember being told from time to time that an Ambassador "wanted" something as if that were all I needed to know about the matter. I have noticed that it is not particularly unusual for Ambassadors to send heated and huffy cables to complain of or insist on something. There is even a term of art, "screamers," for cables of this ilk. I have the impression that an effort to placate the indignant Ambassador is the usual response. In contrast, it seemed to me that on the much rarer occasions when an AID principle officer was rash enough to send in a "screamer" he or she was more likely than not to become the temporary object of mirth and derision at best and suffer loss of credibility at worst. It was not, as in the State Department, simply a useful ploy for getting something taken care of.

I could name Ambassadors and Embassies at particular times that seemed to me blessedly exempt from the tendencies I described. I can also point to AID Mission Directors whose paranoia or megalomania made their tours exercises in regimentation and thought-control. Yet, by and large, I think the contrasts in the styles and tendencies of the State and AID cultures as described above are real. But, I digress!!

Q: So how effectively did this multifaceted and highly leveraged family planning and health program in Nigeria work?

GILBERT: I think it worked. I mean I think the supplies were flowing. And there was a lot of mostly productive activity. And there was evidence that the beginning of a demographic transition was underway in Southern Nigeria.

Q: Well, does that cover Nigeria?

GILBERT: Yes. As regards the other program that I managed, that was Mauritania, and there isn't much to relate except that I wound up overseeing the development and implementation of a detailed phase-out plan.

Q: What's new, right? You were a pro! Anything else on the REDSO thing?

GILBERT: I think that does it.

Q: Well, let's move on. You retired from REDSO?

GILBERT: Yes. I retired from REDSO.

Q: What year was this?

GILBERT: This was the end of 1993.

Reflections on thirty years of experience in international development

Q: The end of 1993...not too long ago. Well, let's step back now and take a broad look at the history of your experience and go down several avenues. First, what do you think are some of the lessons you learned from related to development programs and to assisting developing countries? What would you say to someone who is going into this business about what to look out for, what works and so on?

GILBERT: Great! You are inviting me to launch my true second career as a geezer. Okay, geez I will.

For a development agency, analysis, reflection and decision-making are as important as doing. Therefore, AID needs to maintain the objectivity and intellectual honesty of these internal functions. This is difficult for a many reasons. One hazard is that AID and other agencies need to establish program priorities and themes that are consistent with the technical capacities that they either have or intend to acquire. But working with programmatic themes is risky. One reason is that most of us are overeager to find simple formulae. Another is that people who are competing in a bureaucratic setting for funds, influence and advancement, face strong temptations to be "more Catholic than the Pope."

These factors generate persistent tendencies toward oversimplification, over-commitment and over-zealousness. As a result, guidelines tend to become shibboleths and ideas to become ideologies.

An example of this process occurred when AID decided to focus programs on improving the lives of the rural poor. My recollection is that the emphasis was on the poor majority. But it wasn't long before we began to hear talk of the "poorest of the poor", and soon programs and projects – if not whole strategies – flying under that banner were making their way through the approval process.

Yet focusing on the poorest of the poor is nonsense because they are the people you read about in the Bible who will be with us always. That's because they are the minority among the poor whose problems are the most intractable. If you want to start a fire you apply the match initially to the dry flammable material not the sodden stuff. The sodden stuff may eventually also burn but only if the larger fire is burning well.

So ideas and thought about how to lift up the poor majority gave way to rhetoric and slogans about the poorest of the poor in our internal discourse. I'm convinced that this contributed to our going off the deep end on integrated rural development. We launched many integrated rural development projects, but a substantial portion of them became little more than rural social services projects because, even though we lacked the improved technology to raise farm output and the increased incomes needed for sustainability, we went ahead and met the "needs" of the rural poor by increasing spending on health services, education and adult literacy. So these "pilot projects", rather than being replicated when their value was proved, were discovered to be unsustainable and mostly collapsed of their own weight.

In some cases, that didn't happen. One example of a sounder, if not happier, outcome was in the Mandara Mountains in Cameroon where we simply abandoned our plan to do a rural development project when it became apparent that we did not have a way to boost output and incomes in that setting. Mali provides a truly positive example. There USAID and the Government of Mali focused rural development project activities on areas where the potential to increase production and productivity did exist. Through several changes in mission directors, they continued these projects through several phases. Through time AID and the Government have built the lessons from each preceding stage into the design of the next. At the beginning the distribution of inputs was in government hands, the farmers were in government-organized groupings and there was little or no credit. But, based on experience, real coops were developed, input distribution was taken out of government hands and cooperating farmers' credit needs are now being met by private banks.

Q: So, getting it right in Mali took a lot of time and a lot of learning.

GILBERT: That's absolutely right. Those two were essential ingredients together with the good luck that there were areas in southern Mali with enough agricultural potential to benefit from improved technology, inputs and credit.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say?

GILBERT: Well, I think AID would have been less likely to go through what I regard as a somewhat obscurantist phase if we hadn't purged our economists during the early part of the 1970s. That was equivalent to a self-administered partial frontal lobotomy. How can you operate an agency devoted to international economic development without giving prominence to the discipline of development economics? I think the agency's intellectual processes would have retained their integrity to a greater degree with economists in appropriately designated positions in AID/Washington and in larger field missions.

Now that AID has been getting into democratization and governance I fear that it may not have been paying enough attention to the discipline of political science and to the interface between that discipline and development economics. I seem to see a lot of activity that falls in some sense under the heading of democracy and governance but does not seem linked to any conception that I can understand of the critical linkages between political and juridical change and private sector development. I fear that a lot of AID managers perceive that there is money to be had by programming "D and G" activity and, with the connivance of vested interests in Washington, they go for it even if it doesn't really contribute to a broader strategy. I hope I'm mistaken, but I fear that this may be another example of shibboleths and ideologies emerging from a well-intentioned program emphasis.

Well, another observation that I want to underline is that you can only do less with less. You can't do more with less (unless people were twiddling their thumbs when the effort started, and that has never been the case in AID). This is probably the most important lesson that I learned from my time as Director of the Sahel Office in Washington. Although I can't really see what other honorable choice I had, I tried to do too much. Our staff was cut from something like 24 down to about 17 staff at a time when we were working very hard to prevent the program from going under because of the certification requirements while continuing to meet the ordinary expectations on our office. Some of the people in that office "freaked out" so to speak.

As a result of that experience I became more cautious and more modest in my approach to workloads and challenges. This by the way is another example of the danger of letting rhetoric govern in place of well-reasoned and realistic analysis and decision-making. There was a lot of sloganeering during that period about doing more with less.

Q: What about the interaction of the security-political interests of the U.S. and our development interests? Were they mutually supportive or were they in conflict or was it a combination of the two? What was your experience? You made reference to this recently in the Ivory Coast and in other places as well.

GILBERT: In cases where our security-political interests are mild and straightforward, it is relatively easy to reconcile those with AID's development interests. I'm referring to cases like Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon and Tanzania. In those cases our security-political

interests were simply that these countries make economic and social progress leading to continued or increased stability and that their inevitable neutrality be pro-West or at least impartial rather than pro-East Bloc in nature. In such circumstances we were pretty much free to choose the kinds of projects that we would support based on our perception of their merits. These governments had reason to believe that our contribution was dependent on our perception of their continuing seriousness and, for the most part, behaved accordingly. To the extent that these programs were justified in cold war terms, that had little impact on the content of our programs.

But in countries where our political-security interests were strong and more pointed (either to prop up a figure who was perceived as perhaps a “bastard, but our bastard” or to reward political acts such as support of Camp David or to pay for base rights) then it was more difficult for AID to do its development “thing”, though it seems to me that AID generally tried to promote genuine development in these cases as well. The only such case that I was personally involved in was that of Sudan. I think the project portfolio there was quite well selected and, if properly implemented, would have made significant contributions to national development. The main problem in Sudan was that public finances were flaccid to begin with, then upset by natural disasters and finally overburdened by the war effort so that the government was broke and had great difficulty doing its part in the conduct of our projects. We would have been lost without the counterpart funds generated by CIPs and PL 480 Title I loans. Also, I think we were grasping at straws in conceiving the thematics of some of the CIPs. The quality of our contributions suffered from the political-security imperative of maintaining high levels. As a result we were probably more lenient than we would otherwise have been on conditionality and on Title I self-help issues. But, by and large, we were moving forward on genuine development as well as humanitarian agendas.

The sad thing is that in most cases where the aid relationship was heavily dominated by political-security considerations (e.g. Somalia, Zaire, Liberia) - despite decent efforts on AID's part to promote genuine development (as well as provide financial support through CIPs and PL 480 Title I) - we've seen the emergence of failed states. If our support of bad regimes was an important cause of these outcomes, and I am tempted to think so, I'm not sure what the mechanism is that links the two phenomena. Two cases where we have had lesser, but still greater than average levels of political-security interest – Senegal and Kenya, as a function of base rights coupled with unabashed pro-Western orientation – have certainly not become failed states, though one has to worry about the prospects for Kenya. If I had to venture a theory concerning the relationship between heavy U.S. support and failed state outcomes, it would be that over heavy outside support over long periods allows strong men to stay in power by sheer force and intimidation. This in turn probably causes political structures and institutions to decay or, at least, lose all credibility. So when the big man falls, the State has little authority and commands less loyalty. This can happen also through prolonged, severe misrule without the implication of donors, as in the case of Sierra Leone. But, without AID's involvement (and without the diamond revenues in Sierra Leone), such regimes might either have fallen earlier or moderated their behavior in response to public opinion before normal or, let's say,

peaceful political processes had so completely withered away. But, tempting as that theory is, one needs to also note that Somalia and Congo would have been exceptionally hard cases even without Cold War tensions, and it is difficult to imagine anyone governing them according to Marquis of Queensbury rules.

While we're talking about political-security interests and AID, I might as well observe that I always chafed at the non-development justifications for U.S. assistance that AID furnished to Congress and the public. I can't judge whether it was necessary to use Cold War and near-term U.S. commercial interest rationales, but I think we could have made a greater point than was typical of asserting a long-term U.S. interest in progress and stability in the Third World as essential to our grandchildren's quality of life on this small planet.

The other thing that I might as well get off my chest is that the near-term political and diplomatic benefits of U.S. development assistance vary quite a bit depending on the type of assistance and the amount. Certainly large resource transfers like those entailed in CIPs and PL 480 Title I programs can be exploited for diplomatic, including political-security, purposes. But, by and large, an incrementally funded portfolio of projects cannot be. It isn't "maneuverable" enough to do more than contribute to a sense of cooperation, mutual interest and gratitude toward the U.S. And, one has to recognize that a well-administered program will occasionally generate pain and discomfort because it will occasionally be necessary to deny host government wants and to insist on actions that are distasteful. And, human nature being what it is, host governments begin to take ongoing programs for granted. They can become part of the woodwork. Given these considerations it makes no sense to integrate AID into the structure of the State Department. State and AID are about sharply different things. Involvement of State Department and AID officers in one another's work cannot produce synergy; it can only produce the opposite through distraction of each side from its real mission.

When I first started out I had the impression that a considerable proportion of State Department people both in Washington and in the field were inclined to think that AID programs weren't worth much unless they could be milked for near-term purposes. It wasn't that they tried to accomplish that, but more that they saw little value to AID's presence and activities because they had little direct relevance to their work. In the last 15 or so years I detect a change in attitude. Most career State people I know now seem to view AID programs as having a legitimate long-term development rationale, but appreciate that they are best kept separate from diplomacy. I have a hard time figuring out which people in State want to swallow AID. I don't think I personally know many who would see any good in that.

Q: You were involved in two or three countries where we closed down. Did political-security interests enter into these situations?

GILBERT: Definitely so in the Mauritania case. That decision was triggered at least in part by the Mauritians' having allowed Saddam Hussein to park a lot of aircraft there

during the Gulf war. They were being punished. The Sudan case was pretty much inevitable because of a clause in AID's legislation to the effect that U.S. development assistance cannot continue following a military coup. But the U.S. Government, with good reason, eventually came to dislike the Islamic fundamentalist coloration of the military junta. So political-security interests were also served by the legal requirement for phaseout in Sudan. In Tanzania, the Brooke Amendment required the phaseout. Here again, the legal requirement coincided with a desire on the part of some in the Reagan administration to punish Tanzania for their aggressive opposition to the U.S. on certain issues, notably U.S. efforts to keep Mainland China out of the U.N. I'm not sure that this motivation should be dignified with a political-security label.

Q: Well, let's move now in another direction. You've been involved now for 30 years or more in foreign assistance, has it made a difference? Do you think AID has made a difference? Is there anything special about the AID approach to development over the years that stands out in your mind in terms of having advanced the effort to move development?

GILBERT: Well, I think it is remarkable in the context in which AID's work goes forward that this agency and its people have been as sincere, disciplined and thoughtful as we have been about keeping our focus on development. Even though we don't really dare to tell anybody about it half of the time.

Q: Right.

GILBERT: We have "buy U.S." provisions in our legislation and our procedures as well as a few other strictures that dilute the purity of our efforts (for example, the ban on supporting oil crop production), but they didn't really have much impact. The tied procurement became increasingly liberal during the latter half of my career and then, despite occasional regressions, easier and easier to waive. I don't think we really made explicit decisions that sacrificed development values to mercantile interests.

Q: We didn't pursue mercantile interests?

GILBERT: I suppose that we may have in some cases at one time or another, but I don't recall cases where we were doing projects primarily for mercantile reasons. However, we were required to implement our projects in ways that assured that offshore procurement was from U.S. sources unless there were good reasons to do otherwise. In my experience, where U.S. procurement detracted significantly from development aims, we waived the U.S. procurement requirement. To me that's reasonable. Mercantilism would dictate putting trade first and development second.

There were certainly cases where the mixture of commercial and development considerations got pretty close to even. One possible example involved the Volta River Dam and Aluminum Smelter Complex in Ghana. Unfortunately, I can't remember the specifics of how AID and other donor financing figured in that project. But it was certainly a complex set of decisions. My impression is that much of the financing came

from direct investment and commercial lending as well as from U.S. Export-Import Bank, AID and other donor financing. I think the smelter and the bauxite exporting arrangements made possible the financing the hydroelectric facility and Tema port development that the Ghanaians wanted for a variety of reasons. I don't think the hydroelectric facility and Tema port development were conceived so the international consortium could have their smelter at Tema. But, if one wants to look for mercantilist influences on AID project decisions, one might want to look carefully at projects of that type.

I recall seeing efforts to nudge AID into projects that were mainly justified on commercial grounds. Telecommunications is an area that comes to mind. But in my experience AID simply looked into the development merits and decided not to proceed. During the Reagan administration some of us feared that their legitimate stress on promoting private sector development might miscarry and lead to programs that were more about promoting U.S. trade and investment than about development. But I was impressed and relieved that Peter McPherson and the people around him allowed the professionals to develop guidelines concerning private sector development, which seemed to me – albeit without close inspection - to be reasonable. They focused overwhelmingly on developing favorable African or Third World climates for private sector development rather than on turning the Third World into a happy hunting ground for U.S. corporate interests.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the private enterprise bureau?

GILBERT: No, I know some of the people who were involved though and think highly of them. I'm not sure if Mike Farbman was in that Bureau, but I think he is very sound and talented.

Q: He was in that Bureau. Back to this question then. Did AID and foreign assistance make a difference?

GILBERT: Yes. Most projects meet many of their objectives and many achieve most of them. So, in many cases, there is a strengthened unit or institution that continues after the end of an AID project. Most of the time host country people gain new capabilities, as well as new qualifications, from formal training or new skills from on-the-job training. New equipment and physical plant is often created. Functions such as government statistics, forestry management, agricultural extension services, agricultural research, agricultural credit and education are improved in quality and expanded. Due to non-project assistance, new policies are put in place or existing ones improved. Infrastructure is created. There must be thousands of miles of AID-financed trunk, secondary, feeder and farm-to-market roads in Africa alone. We have contributed to the planning and construction of railroads, dams, municipal water supplies, universities, teacher training facilities, secondary schools and expanded port facilities.

But you ask the question because the difference we hope to make goes beyond leaving something at the end of each AID activity. So I have to acknowledge the “Yes, but...”s. Very often host governments can’t or won’t cover the recurrent costs of donor-funded programs and facilities after the end of the project, so they wither and run down. Equipment isn’t maintained and replaced when it is worn out. People who are trained or learn on the job are transferred away from the unit we were trying to strengthen. Policies and programs change or just run down. How these steps backward compare to the steps forward made possible by foreign assistance varies from country to country. It also varies through time. Countries go through their good and bad times due to changes in world prices for their exports, the quality of their governance, wars and natural disasters. I doubt that anyone can prove that, overall, the steps forward predominate or say by what margin they do so.

I think they predominate, but I’m not exactly an unbiased observer. Part of my reason for believing they predominate is my observation that the steps backward are usually not as gross as they may appear on the surface. Buildings, vehicles and other physical items may go from looking shiny and new to looking scruffy to our eyes, but that doesn’t mean that they aren’t continuing to serve. Third World standards of maintenance are inevitably lower (being under budgeted) than those in Europe and the U.S. but that doesn’t mean that they don’t exist. Sometimes the changes that occur after the end of a project should be taken as a rebuke to donors and their Westernized counterparts whose pride requires that physical plant, commodities and even policies and programs be more complicated, sensitive and fussy than is appropriate for sustained use in the tropical third world. More consideration should be given to whether buildings that need paint and are smelling of mildew are still serving their purpose, whether vehicles that are dented and rattle are still getting people and supplies where they need to go, whether the dilution of policies and programs wasn’t required in the course of adaptation to local realities and of counterparts’ taking ownership of them.

But even looking at things from a less culture-bound view point, sometimes programs, facilities and services that were started with donor support, pretty much break down when that support ends. In some cases that is appropriate as it corrects unrealistic project selection or design decisions. But in most of the AID projects that I know, the main costs are for technical assistance and training – inputs that enhance human capacities either directly or indirectly. I think the resulting increments to host countries’ stocks of human capital are seldom lost. Instead, this increased capacity is exploited in unforeseen ways. Even if the beneficiaries are so discouraged that they leave their own country, the chances are good that they will contribute in other Third World countries.

Q: What do you mean by that? Illustrate it.

GILBERT: In the 1970s and early 1980s many young, highly educated Ghanaians left their country, but most wound up in other, mainly Southern, African countries or in the UN system. These folks continued to contribute significantly. Sometimes, you hear of something that works abnormally well, and you find that a little group of American-trained individuals is associated with it. In Tanzania it was a Tanzanian agricultural

research organization that had benefitted from institutional development assistance under an AID project before my time. Sometimes, as with a number of agriculturalists and economists in Sudanese irrigation schemes, the individuals may not have been trained under any particular project, but several, including AFGRAD. In Ivory Coast, when an impressive civil engineering facility came to my attention, I learned on closer inspection that the Government, using its own resources, had been sending impressive numbers of talented young Ivorians to American universities for post graduate work in technical fields for decades. The point is that when we enhance human capacity in these countries, the results can accrue - and probably do in most cases - whether or not we are involved either as an actor or an observer.

Training is the single most dependably useful thing that AID has financed over the years in Africa. Think about the fact that the cost of four years of postgraduate education is probably about the same as the entire cost of maintaining a U.S. technician overseas for a year or, at most, two years. If he or she goes back home and enjoys a normal lifespan, that investment pays off for at least 30 years. I'm not saying that U.S. technicians haven't done a lot of good and won't continue to be needed, but they are less needed now and, as a group, I can't imagine them to have been as valuable an investment, dollar for dollar, in long-term development as were the programs of training and advanced education that we financed.

I think it was a mistake for us to become so chary of doing infrastructure. The Trans-Cameroon Railway is cost-effective and will be making a major difference in Cameroon for decades to come. The same is true of paved roads if they are made to good specifications. And if they are perceived as vital to the country in question, they will likely receive requisite, though less than optimum, maintenance. Or failing that, they will get periodic rehabilitation. And, even if the donors have to participate in the maintenance or rehabilitation that might be worthwhile.

Creating durable change is difficult and a work of patience. AID needs to be willing to abandon projects when it becomes apparent that they aren't feasible or are otherwise doomed to failure. But, when a viable and valuable effort gets behind schedule or needs more resources than anticipated or if the host government objectively can't pony up their contributions, AID should be really loath to abandon the project at the end of its planned duration rather than retool and continue. Earlier we talked about how sticking with projects through multiple phases in Mali paid off. It seems to me that this is one of the main ingredients to making lasting contributions through donor assistance. How many construction projects ever get completed on schedule or within budget even in this country? Why should we be shocked and dismayed when our technical assistance projects, which are so much less "mechanical", don't work out as planned?

I am encouraged that many projects do get retooled and continued and that AID has been giving more recognition to the need to accept risks and to learn from disappointments and failures. It's important to recognize that national development is an extremely disorderly

process and full of surprises. Progress isn't gradual or linear – it comes in fits and starts. Making it self-sustaining

can be like trying to produce a chemical reaction by adding all the “right stuff” such as skills, knowledge, curricula, institutions, policies and physical capital. But it turns out that some mystery ingredient is an essential catalyst and without it the reaction doesn't take on a life of its own. When, through luck, the catalyst is added, the reaction occurs. These elusive catalysts probably fall under the heading of cultural change. So involvement by Americans and others from the developed world in striving to promote development may be best way of guarantying the unique cultural evolution that each nation needs will eventually come about. I don't mean that Americanization is the goal. Many successfully developing countries are culturally quite different from us. But there are elements of developed country cultures that need to be absorbed by Third World countries so that each evolves the unique culture that it needs to make the development process sustainable.

Q: Are there any sectors or areas where you thought AID has made a distinctive contribution?

GILBERT: Yes. I think the sectors in which we made distinctive contributions are those that we saturated with U.S. technical assistance, training and, occasionally, capital improvements. Those that come to mind are: agriculture extension, agriculture planning and statistics, agricultural research, public health, population and family planning, primary and vocational education and post secondary-level education. In these areas there were many projects that produced the institutional, methodological and human capital changes (let's call them “widgets”) that were sought. But even where the expected institutional “widget” didn't materialize or disappeared after AID financing stopped, I am confident that there are individuals, groups of individuals and entities that have different capabilities, different ways of looking at things and different approaches to getting things done because of their involvement with the U.S.

These intangibles are as important as the tangible things like technical knowledge and skills. It is easy to forget how unique we are. You know, in a number of places where I've worked over the years - like Tanzania where there was a high rate of inflation or Ivory Coast because Abidjan is such an expensive city - there were times when the real, as opposed to nominal, income of AID national staff declined or was unreasonable to start with. We would work to get their compensation schedules rectified. We did this because it was the right thing, but also because we didn't want to lose the staff. We were worried that our good people would go elsewhere for more competitive salaries. But I have to say that I can't recall a single case of a national staff member leaving AID for more money. I think the reason for this is that they become “addicted” to being in an American work setting. Why? They like having the tools to do their jobs. They like being around people who are intensely goal-oriented and who don't let a lot of secondary considerations (ethnicity, color, religion, prerogatives of status, interpersonal likes and dislikes) interfere very much with the getting the job done. Once they get used to it, they like our informality, the give-and-take-relationship between

bosses and subordinates, the transparency of our personnel practices and the openness of our management systems (to inputs from subordinates to superiors).

Of course any American who reads the above would be tempted to say, “Right! Since when are we so wonderful?!” Well, we’re not so wonderful that we don’t have to keep working on all these things, but we’re way beyond Third World norms in these areas. There are significant differences on average between our culture and those of most Europeans as well.

I am just cavalier enough to attempt to sum up the difference. A guiding principle in American work culture is to expect fairness and to “take measures” when it is found to be deficient, as it not-infrequently is. In the Third World fairness is a hope, but a pretty utopian one; therefore, the corresponding principle is patronage. You depend on others to protect you, and you protect those who depend on you. Creating and tending these relationships takes a lot of time and considerable sacrifice of other principles. European work culture varies from country to country along a continuum between the Third World and American norms. There are significant differences within regions – for instance in Northern Europe people stand in lines, in much of Southern Europe only chumps stand in lines. Many Europeans find Americans exasperating in their moral naivety, and that boils down to our ability to believe that fairness is a reasonable expectation. (And, it goes without saying, that there are pockets and outbreaks of Third World work culture in the United States.)

The above is to illustrate that there are important intangibles that our counterparts get from working in collaboration with us. People who have associated with us for significant periods of time become more egalitarian, more concerned about fairness and place a higher value on objectivity in appraising and solving problems.

You know most Americans really don’t grasp how nasty life can be and how much gross and petty, subtle and flagrant evil there can be in the world. By evil I mean individuals and groups victimizing others. Because we are a nation of laws and given that checks and balances permeate American life, the scope for bad behavior in our country is circumscribed to an extent that can only be appreciated by observing what goes on in countries where things are different. And this difference is a good reason to make sure that our people are involved in the strivings of the Third World and that Third World people are exposed to our ways of running our society through programs of cooperation. Third World people can see that things they put up with can be curbed and controlled. We can begin to appreciate the factors that make our own societies comparatively free of the abuses that are rampant in the Third World. We can also appreciate human goodness better when we see it manifested in the many luminous personalities who somehow manage to emerge from that wilder and darker moral landscape.

Q: What about AID the agency. Did you find it a good agency to work with? Did you have problems with it? What do you think about it?

GILBERT: Well, I haven't enjoyed every minute that I've worked in AID. I hate to start with a negative, but maybe it's best to get it off my chest. I found it very hard to stick working in Washington. Except for my initial years as a Junior Management Intern (when my perspective on AID work was embryonic), I never served in Washington without experiencing something akin to swimming under water. I never stayed in Washington longer than the three-year model for rotation tours. I think the reason I found it so difficult was that so much energy was devoted to matters that were only indirectly related to what AID needed to be doing in the field. I had the feeling that too many people were spending too much time trying to burnish their own images and promote their own agendas at the expense of serving AID's mandate. I disliked Washington's tendency to work to rules that served individuals and groups (working the minimum number of hours per day, making a fetish of EEO) but not the Agency's mandate. I hated the fact that it was so hard to get people to abide by the rules - such as those related to the project review and approval process - that served the mandate. When I was in the field I probably harbored even more negative feelings toward AID Washington than were average or normal among field staff. Why? I think it was because I had an acute sense that field units were accountable but that AID/W, as a whole, wasn't. A good, strong desk officer could do a lot to shield a field mission from the consequences of AID/W's disorderliness. But there was only so much a good desk officer could do and they weren't all that common. Just in case this makes me sound like an anti-government extremist, let me say that I usually vote for democrats.

Overall, I have an abiding sense of gratitude that AID exists and for my good luck in getting a job there. Without AID, I can't imagine how I could have spent 30 years of active professional life so satisfyingly.

One reason for this is that the U.S. foreign assistance program is the only broad expression of U.S. foreign policy that I am fully in sympathy with. I don't think I could have lasted long in the State Department Foreign Service because I can't abide it when I think our policy is hypocritical, dishonest, unduly Machiavellian or otherwise distasteful - as it inevitably is from time to time. The CIA would have been out of the question. USIA and Peace Corps offered too little prospect for meaningful impact. The World Bank certainly had the right focus, but it had no operational field staff and, owing to the "Anglo-Saxon predominance", it was almost impossible for Americans to get hired there when it mattered to me.

But AID offered the opportunity to collaborate with Third World counterparts in fascinating undertakings. Since it operated on a significant scale and with resources to match, there was a reasonable chance of satisfactory impact. Its workings were transparent and governed by laws and regulations that were in the public domain. It offered reasonable pay plus the opportunity to live in exotic lands and become acquainted with those lands' inhabitants and their cultures. What more could one ask?

Well, it turned out that there was more that one could ask, but probably not without abolishing the U.S. political process and human nature. I would have preferred that AID be more willing to assert a long-term U.S. interest in Third World development in making

its budget requests to Congress and that Congress accept and support Third World development as being AID's fundamental mandate. Then it would have been nice if AID had been less vulnerable to fads and less fickle in pursuing and abandoning them. One could also wish that each administration had only appointed to the upper echelons of AID people who believed in the importance of Third World development and only wished to make it more productive (as opposed, say, to more responsive to extraneous agendas). And, finally, it would have been great if AID had enough resources to be able to maintain technical capacities in all development sectors so that we could have had a better stocked tool chest for application to each recipient country's specific needs.

Q: Given the pluses and minuses, how did you find working for AID.

GILBERT: I guess I should give my views on some of the strengths and weaknesses of AID that had little or nothing to do with the political force field in which the Agency found itself. Let me start with a plus, the IDI program made AID a better development organization than it had been. When it was first introduced, I was skeptical because I thought the selection criteria, given the lack of a written test (you're talking to someone who tests well), were too lax. But that proved not to be the case, and the requirement that all applicants have had a Peace Corps or similar experience made a great difference in the character of USAID field staffs as the numbers of IDI alumni/ae grew. It made a great difference to get people into AID who knew what the Third World was about and who had made a conscious decision that they wanted actually to work there. And this change affected all the professional cones, including administrative management and financial management. When I first went to the field, there were too many people in our field missions who actively disliked living in the Third World and were doing so for the wrong reasons.

Q: Did you find it an agency that gave adequate room for innovation and creativity?

GILBERT: To some extent, it gave too much room. While the necessity of conceiving and planning strategies, programs and projects was recognized, the same was not true of implementing them – including seeing them through once started. AID top management gave lip service to the importance of implementation, but never figured out how to give it practical emphasis. One fundamental reason for this, in my opinion, was that the promotion precepts emphasized innovation and leadership in bringing change about. It seemed to me that at any given time, there were usually too many people espousing innovations and questioning the status quo and too few doing the best we could with what we had. I believe this hurt implementation. Perhaps it was just a function of my own unique career path, but I was plagued much of the time by a feeling that “forces” – often marching under the innovation banner - were busy unraveling what I had been charged with trying to knit or hold together. Nevertheless, AID was exceptionally good at implementation compared to other donor agencies, but only because we had a field presence in each recipient country, and they mostly didn't.

The drive to innovate could produce some pretty ludicrous “fruit”. I suppose it was someone in GSA who got promoted for changing the U.S. Government Memorandum form so that it no longer said in descending order “To”, “From”, “Subject” and, instead, said “Reply to the Attention of”, “To”, “Subject” in descending order. I defy anyone to identify the practical advantage gained from that change. In AID, the whole Congressional Presentation process was overhauled so that project narratives were only included on new or substantially changed projects. However, every time we turned around after that we had to prepare project narratives for various de-cycled notification requirements. Thereafter, the CPs no longer provided a record of the status of projects at annual intervals. And, it was my experience that these had been very helpful for use in briefings and for reference.

To be candid, I have to acknowledge that I have always been constitutionally distrustful of change and of the motives of those who espouse it. I guess I was prematurely curmudgeonly. And sometimes I was wrong in this. I thought it was a boondoggle to abandon the AID Manual Orders and create the Handbook series, but I have to acknowledge that the Handbooks were much better. If they had done nothing more than serve as a vehicle for the project development guidelines contained in Handbook 3, they would have been worthwhile.

I hardly need to say, then, that I thought the sweeping changes that began in the late 1980s that undercut the role of Project Development Officers (as well as necessary checks and balances) by transferring them to geographic offices and led later to the abandonment of Handbook 3 in favor of a whole new system based on Strategic Objective Team- and Intermediate Result Team-planned and implemented activities (one no longer says “project”), etc. have produced little concrete good to balance all the confusion that they unleashed. On the other hand, if anyone asks me what should now be done, I’ll say, “Don’t abandon it, for Heaven’s sake, but do make whatever changes are really needed to make it work!”

Most of my problems with hyper-innovativeness have to do with its manifestations in the areas of program and administrative management.

However, I believe that rethinking and judicious innovation focused on program substance are essential to the accomplishment of AID’s mandate. I think that AID has stood out among Federal agencies for being so full of people with ideas. And, from my somewhat remote perspective, AID’s top management has often deserved high marks for allowing the agency to be a bustling and competitive market place for those ideas. As a result, life in AID, viewed from one perspective, has been a long intellectual conversation focusing, *inter alia*, on each program strategy and project proposal. That added a lot to our success and to the fulfillment of AID’s programs. Even when it was decided to focus on only a handful of broad program sectors, there was always funding for analysis, if not actual research, aimed at finding out what was needed and what worked best in these areas - so much so, that the rest of the Agency was usually jealous of the responsible central bureau’s budget. Many geographic bureau people were really quite hostile toward

what is now called the Global Bureau. But their work was largely carried out through contracts and cooperative agreements that often required trial field application of innovative approaches. Some Missions actively resisted this and didn't cooperate. They complained that the Global Bureau wouldn't address their priorities. I found that it was often quite beneficial to cooperate with the Global Bureau. It was my experience that, if you accepted that their minimum agenda had to be respected, they would usually also meet your needs - particularly if you negotiated on that point before giving travel clearance. So most of my experience with the Global Bureau produced win-win outcomes. Also, I usually found that the professionals who carried out Global Bureau programs were careful to keep Mission staff informed of their work and share latest developments in their fields.

I believe that AID made significant contributions by sponsoring new and improved ways to advance economic and social development. We were aided in this by productive ties to the university community and by coopting some leading thinkers into AID policy jobs. I'm thinking of Hollis Chenery, Gus Ranis, John Mellor and others of similar stature. Sometimes, changes that originated in the AID-university nexus spread throughout the donor community starting with the World Bank. I believe this was the case as regards the focus on the poor majority. Elliot Berg and Carl Eicher are only two among many examples of creative thinkers and intellectual leaders who contributed importantly to AID's stock of ideas without actually joining its staff.

Q: Did you feel that you were treated well as an employee?

GILBERT: Well, I certainly am not bitter. Distinguishing the Agency from some of the people who passed through it, I think, on the whole, it treated me decently.

I shudder sometimes to think back to my days in Tanzania and am reminded that my career was in a pretty parlous state then. While in Tanzania I worried that no matter how well I accomplished my responsibilities there, their nature was so out of the ordinary and marginal to AID's normal business that I might not be a viable competitor for conventional assignments at the Deputy Director, let alone the Mission Director, level. On the other hand, I knew that I had better give the Tanzania assignment my best shot or my worry would definitely come true.

In this connection, I feel I owe a debt of gratitude to Larry Saiers and Ray Love. I received reassuring indications from time to time that they were paying attention to the Tanzania program and my efforts there to do the necessary. After Ray became Counselor of the Agency, Larry stayed in touch and gave me encouragement. Also, Ann Dotherow in the Services Bureau and Carol McGraw, the Africa Bureau Management Office Director, were both extremely supportive. Both of them were always ready to provide sound advice not only on needed outcomes but also on how to achieve them. Both of them rank among the wisest people I ever worked with in AID.

When it came time to consider next steps after Tanzania and I was asked to go to Sudan as John Koehring's Deputy Director, I swallowed my misgivings and said, "yes" because I think highly of John and because going there seemed to represent the kind of challenge I needed at the time. It was a good decision, though not always an easy one to live with. There again, the career risks were significant. It's not easy to look good with alligators hanging from all parts of your anatomy. Walter Bollinger came to the Bureau and served as Acting Assistant Administrator during the last half of my time in Sudan after John left and I became Mission Director. I will be everlastingly grateful to Walter for the trouble he took to actually understand what we were up against in Sudan and what we were doing about it. He took a positive interest in my work and became a supporter. This was important because I had remained something of a controversial character due to my conflict with the Assistant Administrator for Africa during my stint as Director of the Sahel Office and, subsequently, with his friend, the ambassador who replaced David Miller in Tanzania.

All in all, my career exceeded my fondest hopes in the opportunities for learning and professional satisfaction that it brought. I think I rose about to the level that my aptitudes and abilities equipped me for. I wasn't particularly cut out for working at what would have been the next step in my career – an assignment at the Deputy Assistant Administrator level. I owe my rapid early advancement to being a person who could independently see what was needed and who was self-motivated to do the necessary. I always had an agenda and my bosses usually endorsed my agendas with few changes – at least, as long as my bosses were fellow technocrats. That probably means that I am pretty good at technocratic problem-solving and at organizing and supervising courses of action that embody such solutions. But I have little tolerance for diluting what I see as straightforward responses to objective needs with the kinds of other considerations that increasingly intrude the closer one works with the politically appointed echelon. I have been called "rigid". I accept that if it recognizes that I will do what I am clearly instructed to do if it isn't illegal or immoral even though I have recommended against it. But I'm not able to be a self-started, much less to feign enthusiasm in pursuing goals or courses of action that I can't buy into. Also, I have a lower than average discomfort threshold when it comes to public occasions. I've learned how to do the necessary under such circumstances with a modicum of dignity, but not with notable grace. So for all these reasons I think that I rose to about the right level for me.

Assignments aside, I was very fortunate in that I converted from Civil Service to Foreign Service at the old FS 4 (GS 13) level when I was twenty-seven. I had reached the old FS 3 (new FS 1) level by the time I was 31. I was promoted to old FS 2 at 40 or 41. I think it was because I had been at the old FS 2 level for a while before my conversion to the new Counselor rank, that I wound up at the FE 4 level, which except for my case and those of some others, was the first pay step of the Minister-Counselor rank. That, plus my time earning danger pay in Sudan and the fact that most of my assignments were in the field, probably gave me one of the most generous 30-year career earning records in AID history. I am grateful for having been handsomely rewarded by AID standards for my efforts over the years.

It goes without saying, however, that I would have welcomed promotion to Minister-Counselor rank. But the published promotion standards didn't give much ground for hope. As I recall them, they included organizational management skill and achievements, but emphasized leadership expressed in personally framing and gaining acceptance of new ideas and new policies. Personal success in bringing about reforms through policy dialogue with host government officials was another emphasis. Given that I never thought it appropriate to thrust myself forward as the bearer of ideas that, in well-staffed Missions such as those in Sudan and Abidjan, were generally developed by others and since oral presentations were never my long suit and could usually be made more persuasively by those who in fact were most familiar with the material, I saw that the jobs got done, but did not personally carry the ball, except when that was clearly the most efficient way to proceed. Thus, I hoped for, but never very seriously expected, promotion beyond the grade I held for the last 13 or so years of my career.

I am certainly not an unbiased commentator, but I am not sure that the emphases embodied in these promotion precepts were entirely appropriate to the needs of the Agency. I think the elements of the standards were individually valid, but that, taken together, they should have laid primary emphasis on organizational management and implementation – just what one would expect me to say, right? For whatever its worth, my view is that the main criterion for advancement in the senior ranks should have to do with a candidate's demonstrated ability to lead and manage organizations that produce the kind of outcomes that the Agency needs. Instead, the criteria seemed designed to reward gifted solo performers whether or not they were good at eliciting high levels of achievement from the organizations they headed. It seems to me that the precepts fostered something of Great Individual Performer model over a Great Organizational Achievement model. It seems to me that the latter is more appropriate. To me, the former carries perverse incentives for managers who might be tempted to try too hard to burnish their personal images at the expense of their subordinates, on whose efforts the achievements of the organization mainly depend.

Trying to recall the promotion lists and my reaction to them, I believe it would be fair to say that the majority of those promoted to the Minister-Counselor level merited it according to the weighting of criteria that I think appropriate, but too many didn't. And when I became aware of unhappy or dysfunctional operating units it too often seemed to me that the root cause was a principle officer who doing everything to please higher-ups while treating subordinates cavalierly or worse. When I recall the promotions to Career Minister, two things strike me. One is how few there were. The other is how disproportionately women and minorities seemed to be among the selectees.

Q: How did you decide to retire?

GILBERT: Rather than "TIC" out, I guess I "LCEed" out. I had received a Limited Career Extension while still in Khartoum, something that I think was not uncommon. That prevented me from TICing out when I came to the maximum Time in Class that I was permitted at the Counselor rank. That was a very decent thing for AID management to do.

It permitted me to serve for thirty years and to serve my last tour in a very pleasant and interesting assignment. My LCE expired about 40 months into my assignment in Abidjan. I remember, when asked after about two years in Abidjan for my thoughts about my next assignment, telling my DAA that I would probably retire because I couldn't abide the thought of a Washington assignment yet my wife and I felt the need to live in the U.S. where we could be more available to our immediate and extended families. Yet I was shocked when my LCE wasn't renewed. If I thought at all about the fact that it would expire before I had spent four years in Abidjan, I guess I assumed it would be automatically extended long enough for me to complete that assignment.

I wasn't being singled out. That was the beginning of what can only be called a purge of the AID senior ranks that lasted for years. I thought it was something of an unnecessary blow to both my own dignity and that of the Agency that I departed post before the scheduled end of my tour. But, apart from that one factor, I was treated well. Many of the others who departed in that process became quite bitter. One could sympathize on several levels. Many were in second marriages and had young families facing higher education expenses. And, the economy was pretty flat in the mid-1990s. Even though we had all been made aware that we had only so many years at each SFS grade and that those not promoted would be retired from the service at the end of that period, AID had been routinely granting LCEs to members of the SFS as their TICs expired.

Standing back a bit from its human side, this was an interesting phenomenon. It cleared the way for increased promotions to the SFS and for younger people to rise to principle officer and deputy positions in the field and in Washington. But, from my imperfect vantage point, it seemed that promotions to the SFS were considerably fewer than retirements during these years (1994–97). So what did happen, I think, was that the age, experience and payroll costs of the leadership in the field and in Washington declined on average. The new leadership owed their improved standing to the new administration, and the new administration no longer had to deal with the conservatism of the displaced leadership of the career service.

It was a positive outcome for these two groups, but I'm not sure that it was, on balance, good for the Agency. I would grant that it was useful to make room for new blood in the senior management echelons of the career service, but the forced retirements were too wholesale. Granted that the size of field offices were being reduced to half or even a third of their former direct-hire complements, too many officers were being put into positions for whose responsibilities and challenges they were inadequately experienced. Most grew into these roles, and, perhaps, one could say that this proves the soundness of the risk the new administration decided to take. It was a poor approach even if its consequences turned out to be less bad than they might have been. There is also such a thing as opening the gates too wide for change. For example, I personally doubt that the abuses inflicted by Brian Atwood's czar for administrative and financial management would have gone on as long as they did if the ranks of senior management veterans had not been thinned to such an extent.

I think that just about concludes the “geezing” that I have to offer.

Post-USAID activities - 1994-1997

Q: Do you want say anything about your work since leaving AID?

GILBERT: From 1994 through 1997 I spent about one-third to half of each year working as an independent consultant. I was very fortunate to be invited to join a body called the Policy Consultative Group on Natural Resource Management for Africa (or PCG, for short) that was supported by AID and hosted by the World Resources Institute (WRI). I would say that about half of my consulting work was related to that. My environmental consulting work centered mainly on policy framework and institutional analysis. I led three natural resource management strategy development assessments in Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique; analyzed the institutional framework for environmental management in Tanzania; and drafted a proposed institutional framework section for Guinea’s National Environmental Action. My other consulting work was also largely focused on public administration, institutional issues and strategy development with reference to regional cooperation on agricultural research and on the CILSS/AGRHYMET regional famine early warning system. Two other tasks fit no mold. One was an assessment of the linkages between the Sahel Regional Program and the Sahel bilateral programs. The other was advance information gathering, issues analysis and report writing in preparation for the review by the OECD’s Development Assistant Committee (DAC) of the United States’ development cooperation policies and program.

From January 1998 to early July 2000 I was Director of the core staff of the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) that AID has financed since 1985. In that job I took over from Jim Kelly who served during 1995-97. Our combined tenure covered Phase III of that project. Since July, I have been enjoying the retirement lifestyle, a combination of traveling, writing (including editing and revising this text) and following various other interests.

Working as a consultant brought welcome change after years of resorting to devious methods to find enough time away from meetings, marginal-to-unnecessary interaction with colleagues, briefings, sifting and reading the contents of inboxes and all the other unavoidable time sinks of life in a bureaucracy. Consultants simply gather information, analyze it, frame recommendations, write and present reports, collect their money and go home. I don’t claim to have great creative resources to share with the world, but I do have a creative and analytical bent that was largely frustrated during my years as bureaucrat – albeit in a very interesting and useful bureaucracy. In my consulting, I declined assignments that seemed not to offer a genuine challenge and opportunity for growth. To my way of thinking, that meant turning down requests that dictated filling in for direct-hire employees who were on leave or out sick, etc. So the good aspects of consulting for me were the satisfaction of being free to focus on challenging tasks, learning in that process and entertaining the hope that my products would make a positive contribution.

But there are significant negative aspects of the consulting life. Except for one, all my consulting tasks involved challenging tasks and frighteningly tight deadlines. Even with six-day workweeks I found that I had to work twelve-hour days and seven days a week in order to deliver the goods. Cooler customers may not experience this, but my reaction to uncertainty as to whether I can deliver in the allotted time is to work at, but not beyond, the limits of my endurance. That way if I fail, I'll be sure the timeframe was inadequate, and I'll salvage some peace of mind. So, for "Nervous Nellys," like me, the immersion factor is another reason to choose only inherently interesting topics to work on. A frustration about consulting is that one soon learns that it is by no means certain that the fruits of one's labor will be put to use. We sometimes joke that when one wants to temporize over or even bury a problem rather than deal with it, the obvious course is to appoint a committee. I'm afraid that matters sometimes get turned over to consultants for similar reasons. Also, the consulting assignments that are hardest to turn down almost always come along during the months when I prefer to be in Vermont during ski season or the hot part of the summer. During each of the four years leading up to 1998 I just barely managed to do enough skiing to avoid a financial loss on investments in season ski passes. Another thing that troubled me was that, having definite preferences regarding when to work and not to work, I used up too much otherwise free time trying to arrange a corresponding work schedule. Given that these efforts yielded little, from now on, I plan to be passive.

Q: How did you find working on the FEWS Project?

GILBERT: It was an exhilarating experience. By the time I slid behind the steering wheel, the project covered 17 famine-prone countries in Africa with a staff of some 24 professionals in the field and a staff of 14 in Washington. Most members of the Washington staff served both as functional specialists and "country coordinators" for several countries. The functions represented were agricultural economics, socio-economics, agronomy, agro-meteorology, response planning, computer systems management, data base management, desktop publishing, editor, office manager and staff director. Those responsible for the latter four functions had no country responsibilities. Over the years, the number of African professionals among the field staff had risen to 18. The field staff were skilled in analyzing satellite imagery and integrating the results into analyses of information from all ground sources to provide rolling assessments of the near- and medium- term food security prospects for their countries and regions. The project had developed extensive databases so that current data could be compared to averages and previous peaks and lows.

AID financed FEWS III through contracts or Participating Agency Services Agreements (PASAs) with a private sector implementation contractor, the U.S. Geological Survey/Eros Data Center (USGS/EDC), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The implementation contractor for FEWS III was Associates in Rural Development, Inc. (ARD), and its responsibility was to provide the core staff and conduct the central operations of the project. NASA and NOAA provide various types of satellite

sensing. NOAA, through its National Weather Service, also provides ground station weather data in cooperation with the World Meteorological Organization. The AID project manager (a.k.a. Cognizant Technical Officer) provided coordination on “big issues”, but the core team coordinated day-to-day operations among the institutional partners as well as conducting the field and Washington operations.

The project also maintained collaborative relations with food security monitoring and reporting units within FAO, WFP, the European Union, CILSS (AGRHYMET), SADCC (the food security secretariat in Harare) and the bodies responsible for famine early warning or food security matters in the host countries.

The field staff submitted monthly reports to Washington. Following up on monthly editorial meetings to decide various coverage issues, including whether regional or other supra-country matters required articles, country coordinators prepared draft country articles with attendant graphics. These were intensively circulated and critiqued by all country coordinators, rewritten, emailed to field staff for them to critique, revised as necessary again, submitted to me for substantive approval, revised as necessary, sent to the editor, revised as necessary and submitted a last time to field staff and finally incorporated into a mockup bulletin for my final review before publication and distribution. Bulletins published at the end of each month were based on reports received within the initial five workdays of the same month. In addition, FEWS staff gave briefings on countries and regions threatened by food insecurity and put out special alerts on developments that couldn't wait for the Bulletin. For the Sahelian and Southern Africa countries we conducted and published annual Vulnerability Assessments. FEWS III also published special reports on food security-related problems and situations. Most often, these appeared as Bulletin inserts.

I don't think I've ever worked any harder in my life. Yet it was seldom frustrating for the reason I touched on earlier. We all had a hell of a lot of work to do. However, doing the hell out of it was not an insurmountable problem because we were mostly free of the distractions (like “taking in of one another's laundry” to my way of thinking) that one must put up with in a bureaucratic setting. I suppose that what I used to tell my sons I did for a living, “Talk on the phone and drink coffee,” was still largely true for me. But it was less true than ever before, and my teammates in Washington were mostly able to concentrate on their professional agendas.

The caliber of the people who man the FEWS project is extremely high. Both in the field and in Washington, most of the FEWS III staff had worked on preceding phases of FEWS under different contractors. They knew their technical specialties and food security in depth. They worked hard and smart. There were plenty of hard substantive issues to grapple with. There were also operational challenges. Quality management revolved entirely around making good work excellent. From the perspective of my previous experience as a manager, it was a peak experience – like an ordinary motorist getting to drive a high-performance sports car.

Q: Well, let's wind it up there. An excellent interview. Lots of interesting, good material.

GILBERT: Thank you for the opportunity and for your skill and patience in guiding the interview.

(Let me record also that I worked with you when you were Director of AFR/CWA for a time before I went to Ghana and again when you were Mission Director in Ghana beginning about six months before I went to Nigeria in 1971. The same is true yet again when you were Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa during my first year back in Washington in 1980-81 after I had returned from Cameroon. During, between and beyond those periods I always counted you among my most valued role models and mentors. I learned a great deal from your guidance and, above all, from your example. I can't thank you enough.)

End of interview