Interview with Peter O. Sellar

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An interview with Peter O. Sellar

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Q: Today is January 21, 1999. The interview is with Peter O. Sellar. Will you give us a thumbnail sketch of your career in AID as a preamble to our interview? Just a very, very brief flavor of that.

Career overview

SELLAR: Okay. I started in 1963, which was virtually at the beginning of AID, and I retired 30 years later in 1993, so I was there for 30 years. During that time I started as a Management Intern, worked in the Office of the Administrator and in the Africa Bureau. About a year after I went on to the Tunisia desk in the Africa Bureau and was an Assistant Desk Officer for a year or two, and then an unusual thing happened in that a vacancy came up in USAID Guinea for the Program Officer position. NormalII would not have been chosen for that so soon but I spoke French and they needed somebody right away, so I got to go do that rather than going to Tunisia as an Assistant Program Officer. That was a very challenging and interesting time. I was there for two years, 21 months I guess, and then I did three months' temporary duty in Liberia as Deputy Program Officer, a much bigger and more structured program than the one in Guinea. Then I came back to Washington and did a three-month TDY on the Nigeria desk while we figured out what I was going to do for a long term assignment. I wound up becoming a Capital Development

Officer in the Africa Bureau for the next three years, '68-'71, and then went into a four-year assignment as Program Development Officer in the Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation, a central office that was working with PVOs in attempting to promote PVO/AID collaboration and funding. After that I spent a brief time, just about six months, as a Special Deputy for Joint Commissions in the Office of Middle East Affairs, which was a job that really existed because of the creation of Joint Commissions with Middle Eastern countries after the Camp David accords. But at that point I was being moved around because of mass downgrading and reductions in force (RIFs) in the agency and was bumped from that job under RIF procedures into actually a much better job as Assistant Director for Development in the Office for Central American Affairs. I was there again for only a short time, six months. That was a very interesting job because it was a joint State/AID office and I was Assistant Director - number three in the office - and basically the AID Deputy Director, also supervising State Desk Officers as needed from time to time. This was the only office of its kind left in AID.

From there I went to become chief of the Program Division in the Near East Bureau's Planning Office. I was there for nine years, a very long time to be in one job in AID, but the Obey amendment came along and drastically changed everything in Washington in terms of foreign service versus civil service (GS) positions and pretty much immobilized GS employees in the system.

Q: Were you GS at the time?

SELLAR: Yes. I had a very unusual career in that I only spent two years overseas and 28 years in Washington. There's a story behind that, but that's the way it came out. So I was Chief of the Program Division and then Deputy Director of the Near East Office of Development Planning (DP) from 1976 to 1985, during the time when the programs were very large because of the Camp David Accords.

From there, there was another organizational upheaval which resulted in my moving when the Near East and the Asian Bureaus were combined and I became superfluous. But I was more or less immediately hired by the Bureau of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs' Office of Development (LAC/DP) as Senior Analyst for Central America and Special Assistant to the Director. That was pretty close to the beginning of what's been called the Central America Initiative, so that was a program which was very large and very visible at the time. I was there for five years, from 1985 to 1990, during which time the Democracy Program began and a little office was started to run it. I was the analyst for that program as well as for Central America. I was very interested in it, and was invited by the Director of that Office, the Office of Democratic Initiatives in LAC, to come in as the Senior Program Officer. I did that from 1990 to 1993. At that point I was eligible for retirement and I did retire.

Early Years and Education

Q: Let's now go back to your early years. Where you were born, where did you grow up, what schooling did you have? Were there any experiences that suggest why you got into international work?

SELLAR: Yes, my early years were spent in Connecticut and New Jersey, sort of on the rim of the New York commuter belt. My father was an accountant and successful businessman so I had an affluent upbringing. I went to private schools from the first grade in New Jersey and then to prep school in Massachusetts for four years and then to Harvard. However, because our affluent circumstances had changed drastically and quickly, in college I was a scholarship student and received less and less support from home. So it actually took me seven years to get through Harvard. I got my BA in 1961 after being in the class of '58 originally.

Q: What was your major?

SELLAR: American History and Literature, with no particular focus on international affairs except that I took French all along. I was something of a Francophile and my father had retired back to Scotland which was where he had immigrated from, just as I was entering college. He owned a commercial salmon fishing business in Northeast Scotland, kind of a rural area, so I spent several summers working in that. I would work for say six weeks or so and then spend another month or six weeks studying in France, or pretending to study in France.

Q: Why this fascination with France?

SELLAR: I think it was a combination of things: the language, the literature, the food, the women, the style, the French films. I had studied the language in secondary school. So I had that international experience and also the experience of working in the fishing business in Scotland, which it turns out was very similar to many less developed country experiences, although I only realized that later.

Q: What kind of work did you do in the fishing?

SELLAR: I was just a fisherman; rowed the boat, hauled nets, boxed the fish, carried them up to the ice house and packed them in crushed ice and sent them off to Aberdeen. When my father died after I started to work for AID, I had to go over and run the business. I took a six-month leave of absence from AID. At that time I sold the business because my mother was American and wanted to come back here, and the business was really the only asset in my father's estate.

Q: Where was this business?

SELLAR: Findhorn, Scotland, which is on the Northeast coast.

Q: How do you spell it?

SELLAR: F-I-N-D-H-O-R-N. It has subsequently become quite famous as a New Age community, which was starting when I was there, but I didn't know about it. Anyway, I had that kind of international background, having been to Europe a few times growing up and going through college. I really had thought I would probably go on into academia in literature, but I decided late in the day while in college that I really didn't want to do that. I didn't know exactly what I did want to do, but I figured that doing something international would probably be interesting, so I went to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University for a year.

Q: What year was this?

SELLAR: This was in 1961-62. I only stayed one year because I was so completely out of money that there was no possibility of staying longer or continuing my education further. Ideally I would have gone on to business school or law school after that. In any event I had the year, and during that year I got very interested in economic development, even though I had no background in economics in college. I took a course they offered in economic development which I found mostly incomprehensible, but it made me aware of the existence of this entire aid world and the problems of poverty that existed.

Q: Did any of the faculty stand out in your mind?

SELLAR: Well, we had Charlie Kindleberger and someone else teaching that incomprehensible economics course, which consisted largely of diagrams showing trade effects of different policies. And other professors certainly do stand out. We had Leo Gross, who taught the legal history of international organizations, and Albert Imlah, who taught European diplomatic history, which I found incredibly difficult and tedious. Dr. George Hahn taught the basic international economics course. I found the work very difficult because I hadn't taken basic economics in college and the assumption there was that you had. But I passed all of the courses except the development economics course,

and then took a course at Harvard Summer School to complete the course requirements for the MA degree.

Q: You did get your MA?

SELLAR: I did, but not then. I actually got the MA in 1994.

Q: You went back to finish?

SELLAR: In 1961-62 I did the course work, but I failed the oral exam. Because I was so broke I had to go to work, and I figured that with the people involved in the oral exam there was a low probability that I would pass it while they were still there. It made no difference to AID so I just put it out of my mind and went on with my career.

Q: Did you have to write a thesis?

SELLAR: I did in 1994, when I finally completed the degree.

Q: What did you write on?

SELLAR: I wrote on the issues and problems encountered during the first 10 years of the AID Democracy Program.

Q: Well, we'll come back to that. Very interesting. Then what happened?

Joined USAID in the Office of Management Planning and the Africa Bureau - 1963

SELLAR: It was then that I really got interested in economic development, so, of course, we were applying for jobs during that year. I came down to Washington and interviewed at AID and USIA and Commerce, and I was taking the Foreign Service exams too, for the State Department. I thought AID was what I really wanted to do. I passed the Foreign Service exams, so I could have done that, but I thought I would be more comfortable at

AID working on problems of poverty and not having always to be supporting every U.S. foreign policy position, including some I might not want to support.

Q: How did you get into AID? Were you a Management Intern?

SELLAR: Yes, I took the Management Intern Exam, which was a Civil Service wide exam, and passed that. At the time I assumed that was the only way you went to work for AID. I had no knowledge of the parallel foreign service entry system, which I guess at the time was called Junior Officer Training. I guess there was also an exam for that - I don't know - but I was told only about the Management Intern Exam and took that. Again, with AID just beginning to form there was probably heavier input of Civil Service people than Foreign Service initially despite the fact that we were a Foreign Service agency. Of course, there is a whole history to that resulting in the Obey Amendment, which drastically reversed that later.

Q: When did you join AID?

SELLAR: 1963.

Q: What was your impression of the agency in your first year; did you get a good orientation?

SELLAR: Yes, I did. I was sort of awed by AID, because I only had that one year at Fletcher, really a rather thin background, and had no relevant work experience except the salmon fishing. But I felt good about my initial assignments. I was assigned to the Office of Management Planning, with the people who really brought me into AID, and I found myself after having been there for about a week being given the assignment of writing a publications policy for the agency.

The Office of Management Planning was the branch that served the Administrator and Deputy Administrator with recommendations for reorganizations, staffing levels, and

miscellaneous policy issues such as the publications policy that it wasn't logical to send anywhere else. It was a small staff and they had bright people.

Q: Any issues in writing a policy paper your first week?

SELLAR: Well, yes. I felt utterly inadequate to do it, but I was told that there was a Publications Office under scrutiny by the Deputy Administrator that was turning out an enormous amount of stuff. In those days they were broadcasting technical papers on virtually everything. The Deputy wondered why we needed that much stuff or even any of it. The Publications Office, of course, tried to defend itself, so they provided a rationale for what they were doing. It was really just up to me and my supervisors to come up with recommendations that tried to reconcile the two differing view points. We did recommend cutting back on some of the stuff being broadcast; but we also said that we believed there was definitely a function for the office, that there needed to be a centralized office, and that it shouldn't be put out of business. I think that really was the issue. Actually I was commended by the Deputy Administrator for a fine paper, so it worked out well.

The other significant assignment in that office was to edit the manuals being written to merge the two predecessor agencies into AID. One was the Development Loan Fund, which was capital projects, and the other was the International Cooperation Agency, which was the technical assistance and humanitarian aid. Although AID had been created I guess a year or two earlier, the manual orders were still being written.

Q: What kind of issues, concepts did you have to wrestle with, because that's a very interesting stage in AID?

SELLAR: Honestly, I don't remember dealing with any major issues. I was so new, I didn't really know anything and I was just working as an editor. I would take something that was being drafted somewhere else and edit it. I remember that I made something of a hit by, on

the urging of my supervisor, ruthlessly editing a thirteen-page paper down to three pages and having the person who wrote it say he thought I had improved it in the process.

Q: That's quite a challenge. Any feel for the different philosophies or attitudes of the two different agencies?

SELLAR: Yes.

Q: How would you characterize them?

SELLAR: I think their differences showed for a long time in AID in the sense that you had loans seen as being separate and different from grants, and requiring different kinds of analysis and expertise. Loans were normally capital projects - infrastructure or financial - and grants were normally technical assistance. The Loan Officer mentality was somewhat different from the Program Officer mentality. The Program Officer was someone who usually occupied himself primarily with issues of technical assistance.

Q: Did you see different approaches to program planning?

SELLAR: Yes. On the one side the loan officers were very project oriented, and I think they also tended to believe the prevailing theory of development at the time, which was capital formation: if you could just help countries build their airports, their roads, their infrastructure and private enterprise, that would be the most important thing to do. The “hardware” of development. Also there was a big emphasis on feasibility analysis for the projects because the projects themselves should be self-financing as regards the economic and financial rate of return. Whereas, on the technical assistance side they were looking at the “software” aspect of development in terms of human resource development, health, education, training, and subjects that didn't lend themselves as readily to cost-benefit analysis but were looked at in terms of whether they were cost efficient or cost effective, and I think that the people on that side tended to believe that those were really the most important aspects of development.

Q: Did you find it difficult to bring the two together in a common guide?

SELLAR: No. Other people were actually doing the drafting. I was just doing the editing. I was the new face on the block and had some editorial experience.

Q: A very educational task for you?

SELLAR: Yes, it was a perfect assignment as an introduction to the agency because I learned about both sides.

Q: Any other assignments that stand out in your mind?

SELLAR: I had only one other assignment; I didn't do a general rotation through a number of offices. That is technically supposed to be done, but I was in Management Planning for six months and that was fine with me because it was also a good vantage point from which to see the rest of the agency and understand who did what and how it was organized. And I got very good briefings from the people I was working for. The last half of my first supposedly rotational year was spent in Africa DP, Office of Development Planning.

Q: What was your function there?

SELLAR: It was just to be an Assistant Program Officer and participate wherever possible in terms of the ongoing functions of the Program Office at a junior level, and to learn about the agency programming process and the budget process, and just to participate in it and learn the entire cycle.

Q: Did you learn anything special about the African development situation in that job?

SELLAR: I got the impression that African development had a long way to go. It was after all 1963 and a number of these countries had only become independent very recently. Some of them still weren't even independent, I think. So my impression was that they were

beginning at the beginning, although there were variations depending on the extent to which the former colonial powers had developed the country's resources.

Q: You were there a brief time, I guess?

SELLAR: It was about six months. It actually turned into an assignment there so I was actually there for a full year and a half.

Q: Were there any particular issues you had to deal with at that time?

SELLAR: I'm sure there were, but I'm not sure I can remember them.

Q: We can come back to that.

SELLAR: Okay.

Assignment on the Tunisian Desk - 1964

Q: Then after that assignment you went on to the Tunisia Desk? This was in 1964?

SELLAR: Yes, and I was there for a couple of years.

Q: What was the situation in Tunisia at that time?

SELLAR: Well, they were doing relatively well as compared to most African countries. Of course in a way, you can say they are not even an African country, but they are more of a Middle Eastern country, but they happened to be in the Africa Bureau. They were much more advanced than most of the sub-Saharan African countries, except for South Africa, but they still needed help with a lot of things. We had a big program, and we had the luxury in those days of having three desk officers. A chief officer and two assistant desk officers, of which I was one.

Q: That's just for Tunisia?

SELLAR: Yes. Of course, it would never be possible today to have three officers. But it was a big program. We organized ourselves sectorally, so I took agriculture and tourism and my colleague took the other sectors we were active in.

Q: What was the situation in tourism in Tunisia?

SELLAR: They were just trying to get started, actually, developing an organized effort to be attractive. We, in fact, financed a tourism master plan for them, although it was controversial as to whether we should be involved in tourism development.

Q: Why was it controversial?

SELLAR: Well, some people felt that it was inappropriate because it attracted gambling and skimpily clad women.

Q: Corrupting society.

SELLAR: Yes. People also said it didn't really provide much in the way of multiplier effects in the local economy. The only additional jobs created were low level jobs cleaning rooms and being waiters and whatnot. Personally I felt that wasn't true, that there was a lot that could be done with handicrafts as well, and that, in any event, those low level jobs were jobs that hadn't existed before. People were happy to have them, or they wouldn't have gone into them. So there was some development even though it wasn't ideal. Also, it was just a fact that for some countries tourism was the most important natural resource they had. Tunisia has beautiful beaches and very interesting Greco-Roman remains and other things that people would be interested in. It didn't have a lot of mineral resources to work with, or too much on the agriculture side because of the dry climate.

Q: Before we get to agriculture, what were we trying to contribute in tourism?

SELLAR: We contributed the proposed plan to help them get going, and beyond that I can't tell you exactly how much further we went. I don't think we went much further than that because the Mission Director who was sent out during this period was one of the ones who didn't really like tourism. So I don't know that they took it any further.

Q: Do you remember the main features of the plan?

SELLAR: I remember one suggestion was that we try to do something about the flies, which were all over everything and everyone in Tunisia, and also to get them to prepare their cakes in some other manner because they tasted rancid. These were very specific recommendationI remember them because I personally experienced the flies and the rancid-tasting cakes. In addition to these specific things, there were obviously broader suggestions. How to develop the Greco-Roman ruins and other sites to increase tourism expenditures, by such means as staging events at them as they did in Egypt and other places. And start putting in higher value hotels that would attract the higher income clientele, because Tunisia had only low rate facilities on the beaches, and mostly Germans came, who spent almost nothing. Things like that.

Q: And in the agriculture sector, what were we trying to do?

SELLAR: I can't actually remember that with any precision. It's a dry country so most of it I think was in livestock, helping them try to increase the productivity of their herds. We also did an enormous amount of tree planting under PL 480 Title II. I suppose you'd say that was more environmental and natural resource conservation than agriculture, but the trees were used for fire wood. It wasn't justified as being environmental at that point. It was justified as a kind of a WPA program, job creation, even though obviously it wasn't anything that we could sustain. Nevertheless there was a significant unemployment in Tunisia, and this was one way to deal with that it in the short term at least, and give the other developmental things going on a chance to take root.

Q: How well did the program work?

SELLAR: It was very successful.

Q: Any recollection of scale?

SELLAR: It was a large scale program. I think we were employing around 50,000 Tunisians, a significant portion of the labor force. It was PL 480 Title II.

Q: Who was managing the program?

SELLAR: The Tunisian Government.

Q. You weren't involved in it?

SELLAR: No.

Q: How did you find your first venture into a developing country?

SELLAR: I think actually my first venture into a developing country was Scotland. But I thought Tunisia was absolutely delightful. Tunisia is and was a charming place. It has a French atmosphere, which I like, and has beautiful beaches and flowers blooming and Mediterranean architecture. The country was running pretty well, the air conditioners worked in the hotels, and there was an interesting variety of restaurants. From what I could see of it from the work I was doing there, it was delightful.

Q: How would you characterize the development condition of the country?

SELLAR: I'd say it was a mid-level developing country, well above almost anything else in Africa. Although there was some severe poverty, it wasn't as pervasive as in most developing countries. In fact for many years I think we provided aid to Tunisia long

after we really should have stopped. I worked myself, to try to phase it out. I always recommended that when I was in Africa/DP.

Q: Why was that?

SELLAR: Because they didn't need it nearly as much as most other countries. The counter argument was that they could use it more effectively. Of course that's an argument that went on forever.

Q: Is that the main reason why we did not phase out and kept going back?

SELLAR: No, I don't think so. I think probably the main reason was that the State Department wanted us there. There were some security considerations in the Cold War context, although not major ones. We didn't have any bases there, I believe. Also, quite frankly I think both on the State and the AID side people wanted to continue it because it was a very nice post.

Q: You didn't find any State Department specialists wanting to influence the structure of the program?

SELLAR: No. Not the content or the structure of the program. It was really just a question of the level of the program and continuing it rather than terminating it.

Q: How did you find the Tunisians to work with?

SELLAR: Very good. Very cooperative, and they seemed to be interested in what we had to offer. They were much better educated than most of the folks I encountered later in other countries. Very good to work with.

Q: Any special issues you had to work on during two year stint?

SELLAR: I can't really remember that there were any special issues other than the ones we have already talked about. There were issues of program assistance versus totally project assistance, which my boss Phil Birnbaum handled. He was an exceptionally able guy, a Ph.D. economist. He just did the big issues himself. My issues tended to be more sector or project-level, such as should we be in tourism or not, and levels and types of programs and projects.

Q: What happened after your Tunisia assignment?

Transferred to USAID/Guinea as Program Officer - 1966

SELLAR: I was slated to go to Tunisia as Assistant Program Officer, which I was greatly looking forward to, but then, as I mentioned earlier, the Program Officer in Guinea had to be evacuated very quickly because his daughter fell out of a window and broke her back. So they needed somebody in Guinea just as I was about to go to Tunisia, and I was offered that job despite my youth and inexperience. Guinea at the time was still a big program. It was the third largest program in Africa when I got there. By the time I left it was virtually gone. It was a phase down situation, and I'm sure they never would have sent me there if the decision hadn't already been made that they were going to downgrade the program.

Q: What was the situation in Guinea?

SELLAR: We were dealing with a turbulent situation in terms of the Government and Sekou Tour#, the president.

Q: This was 1966.

SELLAR: Yes. The Chief of State was anti-American, leaning much more toward the communist side, but he was like a pendulum that swung back and forth. They would occasionally get fed up with the way the Russians were doing things and throw them out

and let us back in, and then get fed up with what we were doing and throw the Peace Corps out and throw us out and let the Russians back. While I was there, we had our program and the Russians and the Chinese were also there and official relations were very frosty. Shortly after I got there, there was a staged demonstration against the U.S. because of some paranoid thought in Sekou Tour#'s mind that we had had something to do with his Foreign Minister having been taken off a plane iGhana. He whipped up a mob that stormed the Ambassador's residence and terrorized his wife and small child, although they didn't hurt anybody. The people themselves, in fact, were not really hostile, they were quite friendly. This event resulted in the Ambassador being recalled to Washington on consultations for quite a while. I was moved into the residence as a resident bodyguard, because I was the only available male bachelor. We were a joint State/AID operation and all worked in the same building; the staffs of both organizations were fairly small.

Q: To guard the residence?

SELLAR: Really just somebody to make the Ambassador's wife feel a little more comfortable. Just to have a man in the house. That led to some great stories. There were other instances where the Peace Corps was thrown out at one point because they were suspected of something. The government just didn't want American people up country. So we were under house arrest for a few days. A few of us, however, were allowed to circulate and let the Peace Corps volunteers know — many of them lived in isolation — that there wasn't anything to worry about, that nobody was being hurt. Things like this kept happening and they were disruptive to the program. The Guinea government would abruptly decide that Pan Am was doing something wrong and they would kick out Pan Am and invite Aeroflot back in to basically run the Guinean airline. That happened while we were there. All these things were making it difficult to run an AID program and were reflective of tense and antagonistic political relations.

Q: What kind of program did we have; what were we doing?

SELLAR: Well, when I got there we were doing quite a bit. We had a large industrial-vocational training project that was run by the Organization for Rehabilitation and Training (ORT) so we could provide French-speaking personnel. ORT was technically a U.S. organization but in reality got its staff from Northern Africa and Europe. This was a very important project because it was about the only thing in the country that managed to fix things. Electrical, air conditioning, welding, technical level skills. All the useful things, maintenance of heating units, etc.

Q: What did you do in agriculture?

SELLAR: We had research stations upcountry staffed by Peace Corps volunteers. When the Peace Corps was thrown out, we terminated that project. I can't remember anything else in agriculture.

Q: What kind of training did you have?

SELLAR: We had a large training program - 400 to 500 people. We were under pressure to finish it. I spent a lot of time working to phase it down and out so that the people who were training in the U.S. to replace expatriate instructors would come back. We would schedule a year's overlap and then the expatriate would leave. Then we had to bring in technical assistance again.

Q: How did you find the Guinean people to work with?

SELLAR: They were nice to work with. They are very nice people. The problem was that because of the poor political relations between the governments, it was risky for them to become too friendly. So there was virtually no social contact with them.

There was one exception. We had a USIA-sponsored jazz band come through. A big Guinean crowd turned out for that, despite any risks. There was a resident USIA person, but one of my Assistant Program officers had a large house, a perfect spot for entertaining,

and we invited a lot of people to a reception after the concert. About a hundred Guineans came. But other than for something like that we didn't see them.

Q: And the living conditions there?

SELLAR: They were okay. The most important thing was just to make sure you had air conditioning. It was so humid all the time. I had a good experience there. There were highs and there were lows. A lot of it depended on the status of my love life, and on which weather cycle we were in. When it wasn't raining all the time, you could get outside and play tennis and sail and take boat trips for weekend swimming and picnics to a nearby island with a lovely beach. It was harder when these activities were shut down during the rainy season.

Q: Any particular crisis or issues?

SELLAR: There was continuous crisis.

Q: Describe some of the crisis that occurred. Were you under instructions to phase down the program?

SELLAR: We knew we weren't going to get money for any new projects. We'd only get money for continuing projects as long as those projects were able to function. The policy context was clear. One time I went to some lengths to get approval for one individual to go for training back in the States, and sent in strong justification for that. It was approved and then we got a note back from the Office Director in Washington saying “Don't ever do that again.”

Q: Were there any kinds of linkups with economic policy changes at all?

SELLAR: If so that had happened long before I got there. Nobody was attempting to do it during my tenure, though I did have an economist on my staff when I first arrived. But she wasn't really policy-oriented, and the position was eliminated when she left.

Q: PL 480 , were you programming that as well?

SELLAR: We were, and we didn't do that in any enormously coherent strategic way. There just wasn't that much interest, given the fact that we were phasing down the program.

Q: What happened after Guinea?

SELLAR: I left in 1968. I wasn't there for a full two years because things had dried up to the point where there wasn't that much left to do. So they sent me down to Liberia for three months. They had a vacancy in the program office. I found it similar to Guinea, but also quite different. They were so obviously influenced by the United States as opposed to the French cultural influence in Guinea. I didn't like Liberia. They were corrupt. Though I shouldn't say that because I didn't have any firsthand knowledge of it. I did get to make a long trip through the interior of Liberia, staying with Peace Corps volunteers since there were no other accommodations. We had to walk part of the way through the jungle since there was no road. I formed a great admiration for the Peace Corps volunteers, living in isolation from their peers in rural villages and only seeing someone from headquarters once a week with mail. That trip is my most vivid memory of Liberia. Otherwise, it was just office paperwork.

Q: Where did you go after that?

SELLAR: Then I went back to Washington, on home leave, with an onward assignment as the AID Operations Officer for Niger. But when I was back here I met the woman who is now my wife. I wasn't quite ready to ask her to marry me, but also wasn't ready to go back to Africa without her, so I got myself assigned here in Washington to a temporary

position on the Nigeria desk. Then I got myself assigned to the Africa Bureau Office of Capital Development (CDF).

Work with the Africa Bureau Loan Office - 1968-1971

Q: What did you think about work in that office?

SELLAR: I thought it would be a good idea to learn how to be a loan officer as well as a program officer. Those were the two main streams of activity in AID, as we have already discussed. I had responsibility for a portfolio with about 15 different loans in four or five countries.

Q: How were these divided up?

SELLAR: It wasn't sectoral and it wasn't regional. I think it was mostly just a question of workload that determined who got which projects. The loan shop wasn't that big. As I recall, implementation authority had been delegated to the field to a great extent. Because once a proposed project was approved in Washington, it was a project and then there was implementation and that was mostly in the field. You needed engineers and loan officers out there to deal with it.

Q. What were some of the significant projects that you worked on?

SELLAR: I worked on the TANZAM highway, which was a big highway going through eastern Africa - TAN being Tanzania and ZAM being Zambia. It was being done portion by portion. I had to do the loan paper for that.

Q: Why were we doing the TANZAM Highway?

SELLAR: We were creating necessary major infrastructure. It was before the New Directions movement guided the agency emphasis toward the software stuff rather than

the hardware stuff. It was at a time when the agency had enough money to do a lot of these capital projects, which progressively declined as funding declined. So I did that one.

Q: Were there any particular issues involved in doing that project?

SELLAR: There was an issue actually with the bids. Our chief engineer in Washington felt that all of the bids were too high and it should be rebid. That drew the ire of the low bidder. This was an issue that went to the Deputy Assistant Administrator, who by then was Phil Birnbaum. I supported the rebidding because I thought the engineers knew what they were doing. They were saying we could save a million dollars, which was a lot of money in those days, making it worthwhile to rebid. Other people were saying that we should just go ahead, particularly the company that would have gotten the award. Birnbaum decided in favor of rebidding it, and the new bids came in a million dollars less.

I also worked on a large telecommunications project that involved AT&T.

Q: Where was that?

SELLAR: It was regional but I can't remember which countries it was in. I don't recall any major issues other than it was chronically behind schedule. Maybe the most interesting thing that I did was to get involved in sector loans.

Q: What are sector loans?

SELLAR: A sector loan is different from a project loan in that it is a program loan in the sense of either a cash grant or a commodity import program, but directed at a particular sector and at achieving particular objectives in that sector rather than at the economy as a whole. There was an interest in doing them because project loans took so long to design and they took so long to implement.

Q: What is long?

SELLAR: I would say two to three years from the inception of the idea and the presentation of the first project in the budget before it was approved and before you had somebody on the ground to start to implement it. The host countries didn't like that and the State Department didn't like that. Then it would take another five to seven years to implement, generally.

Q: Was it necessary to take that long?

SELLAR: Given the agency's programming process, which is tied to the government budget process, and given the Federal procurement regulations, there didn't seem to be any easy way to shorten it. Everybody was frustrated by it and tried to come up with ways, but I can't remember that there was any solution, particularly for these large projects which did require a feasibility analysis. A full scale feasibility analysis had to be done in stages for these big projects. So we were looking for ways to transfer resources faster and as effectively or even more effectively.

Q: What was the loan you were working on?

SELLAR: It was in Ethiopia; an agricultural sector loan. I wrote the loan paper for this, the first sector loan that the agency did. It was approved but it was controversial. The old timers just didn't like this approach.

Q: What were the main features of the loan?

SELLAR: It was providing the agricultural sector with certain resources such as fertilizer, equipment, and cash to start some rural loan programs. I can't remember the specifics beyond that, but the idea was that we were doing it because we regarded the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture as competent to use this money productively.

Q: Was this for Ethiopia generally or for a particular area?

SELLAR: For Ethiopia generally. We developed it and negotiated it with the government of Ethiopia. I'm not sure we were asking for too much to see how it would work.

Then having done that, I was, assigned to do another one for Tanzania, but I recommended against doing that one because I didn't see any sign that the Tanzania Ministry was capable of handling it. But the Mission found a way to do what they wanted to do just by calling it a project support loan. There was very little difference: just that we tied funding more specifically to the kinds of equipment and supplies that went in and tied these to technical assistance projects that we already doing. In that sense it worked.

Eventually the Mission Director started talking to me again, after having initially been very angry that I scuttled the sector loan.

Q: Were there other major loans? You were certainly pioneering on sector loans, which have become more common these days. Were there particular concepts then that are different from what we are doing now?

SELLAR: I don't think so, the concepts are pretty much the same. I don't know what they are doing now. I don't even know if they are doing sector lending now.

Q: Probably not as sector loans but as sector grants at any rate.

SELLAR : Right. I don't have the impression that the Agency has been doing that in the last few years. I have been gone for five years. It seemed to me that even during the 10 years or so before I left there wasn't much of it.

Q: Do you know how the one in Ethiopia worked?

SELLAR: The trouble is one keeps moving on. I think that there was an evaluation done and the evaluation concluded that the loan had been reasonably successful.

The other major activity that I handled while I was in that job was brokering negotiations between AID and several U.S. consulting firms for a multi-sector loan in Ghana, four different sectors. Agriculture was one of them. I can't remember offhand what the other ones were. Probably education as well. It was a very important study. The Ghana government was paying over a million dollars for it. It was very unusual to pay that much for a study, but they were trying to come up with a development plan and this would be a major aspect of it.

Q: Was that unusual for a loan?

SELLAR: It was a loan, which would make it unusual.

Q: Another pioneering effort?

SELLAR: Well, perhaps, I don't know. But it got done. There were a lot of issues. Trying to help the Ghana government work it out. Why so many kinds of people were needed. Why this needed to be paid for. Was the overhead rate reasonable enough? Things you might expect a Contract Officer to do, but for some reason I was doing it.

Q: In what year was this?

SELLAR: It was '68 - 71 when I was in Africa CDF. I can't tell you the exact year. Those were the highlights, I think, of that assignment.

Q: How did you find working in that unit?

SELLAR: I enjoyed it and I felt that it was excellent experience. My boss was Al Disdier. I liked him. He was supportive. We had our limitations sometimes, and difficulties with other parts of the Agency in terms of things we wanted to do, but we usually got them approved. The other loan officers were good; I learned from them, particularly Bob Berg. They taught me how to do cost-benefit analysis. I'd had a little bit of it in a course, not much. I liked the

people I was working with and felt we were a useful complement to what was going on in the technical assistance side, which was not being handled by our office. There was an office of technical support that handled the technical assistance.

Q: Anything about the Agency, working in it, that sticks out in your mind?

SELLAR: Not particularly.

Q: Well, what happened after your assignment there?

Joined the USAID's Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation - 1971

SELLAR: I went to what today would be a global office, the central office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation. And you may ask why did I do that?

Q: What year was this that you went there?

SELLAR: 1971. That was an unusual thing to do for someone who was a program and projects officer because it was not regarded within the Agency as a mainstream activity at all, and the people in there who were doing it were not regarded by any means as being the cream of the cream in terms of agency talent. But quite frankly the reason I did it was because I was offered a promotion and also because I thought it would be a good time to be going in there because of the whole New Directions movement, which I strongly believed in. It was clear that there was going to be an opportunity to do more with development-oriented PVOs than had been the case.

Q: What was your understanding of the New Directions that was taking place about that time?

SELLAR: It's funny, you know, I looked up Ted Owens' book Development Reconsidered yesterday and discovered I hadn't read it. Nothing was marked up; when I read something I always mark it up. I also discovered a small paper by Jim Grant that appeared in one

of these publications on bottom-up versus top-down development - one of the themes associated with the New Directions. I saw it as being a new development strategy, a definite change in the paradigm, away from emphasis on capital formation and toward bottom-up as opposed to top-down development, with the need for a lot of local collaboration in any thing we do. The need for development of local capabilities in a more decentralized manner, that's how I would sum it up. There's probably more to it. I liked these new directions.

Q: You found that it was more appealing to you?

SELLAR: That's right. There was more to be done particularly in terms of local collaboration, involvement of people, than in the capital projects, which in some cases were undoubtedly helpful but in other cases may not have been. We had a project almost everywhere for the upgrading of an airport, for example. Whether that was really because anybody worked out a development rationale in terms of it being a priority area or was simply a way for getting people in and out of the country safely was something I had my doubts about. Whereas the New Directions focus seemed more broadly relevant to the priority development needs. Also, I was just interested in a change.

Q: This office that you were assigned to, what was its function?

SELLAR: It was a central office. It was not even physically located in the State Department as I recall; it was in Rosslyn. Its overall function really was to serve as an interpreter between the U.S. private voluntary community and AID. Try to explain each to each other and to try to help PVOs get approval for funding of some activities. Of course, there was also all the humanitarian stuff done in terms of ocean freight and PL 480. I guess ocean freight was what they handled that had always been there for humanitarian activities. I was interested in the developmental side. There was an opportunity, at that point, that really had not existed before to start to help some of the developmental agencies get some AID funding. The New Directions had sort of become a policy for collaboration on local-level,

bottom-up activities. Now the question was, what are you going to do and how are you going to do it.

Q: What was the image you had of the PVO community at that time?

SELLAR: That there were only a few agencies that had strong enough programs and strong enough personnel capability that one could work with them effectively.

Q: Such as?

SELLAR: Such as Save the Children, or CARE. Some of them, of course, didn't want our money. I think it was the Mennonites that had quite a good program, but they didn't touch US Government money. But most of the agencies were weak.

Q: In what respect?

SELLAR: Weak in terms of management and in terms of ability to track resources. Weak in terms of ability to look at their programs in terms of whether they were accomplishing anything or not. The evaluation and monitoring function was pretty much absent. Because they were just doing good. Just to be doing it was good enough. What we did was to develop a concept called the Development Program Grant which was basically an institutional strengthening grant to these organizations to enable them to improve their staff both quantitatively and qualitatively. In terms of developmental thinking and improving their capabilities to monitor and evaluate their programs, and to improve and diversify their fund-raising sources. There was always a target of becoming, if not totally self sustaining, at least more self sustaining so the AID grant could be seen as ending at some point. So we developed this concept. I sa“we:” I mean I had a hand in it. John Ulinski was Director of the office. I had worked for him in Liberia, which was partly why I was hired.

John Ulinski was a smart guy; and the Deputy Administrator, Harriet Crowley as the Assistant Administrator, and after her Jerry Kiefer, were very eager to see us do

something with this new initiative. So, I had a lot of support from them. I did two things: I worked on this concept globally and worked with agencies globally, like Save the Children, the YMCA, Technoserve, and Africare. Those were, in fact, four grants that I was instrumental in getting approved. Initially, sort of launch them and get them off the ground.

Q: What were the grants designed to do?

SELLAR: They were designed to strengthen a particular agency's capability to design its program more professionally and to monitor and evaluate it more professionally. Implementation was usually something they could do all right, sometimes not. But, it's these other areas that were weak. We also sought to strengthen their capabilities to attract host country support and to have a diversified fund raising plan. We worked with them on that. It helped in getting the initial grants approved that I could talk to the Regional Bureaus. I'd been in Regional Bureaus, and understood their language and their concerns, so I could translate that back to PVOs. There were other people getting things approved too, but I think I really did most of them.

Q: What were the scale of these grants?

SELLAR: Well, initially not big. I mean, we're in the late 1960s and '70s here, so a million or two dollars would have been a good grant. Some of them were a lot less than that. The initial grant to Technoserve was for only $75,000.

Q: How many years?

SELLAR: Usually they would get it for three to five years, just because that was the way you got things approved. And, really the idea was also that since they were new and experimental, there was no sense getting into something that ran too long, if it turned out not to be successful.

Q: What was the objective of the grant at the end? What were you supposed to have accomplished?

SELLAR: Well, specific objectives in terms of certain kinds of staff on board, an evaluation system set up and functioning. In certain cases there was a program expansion objective, i.e., to establish programs in six countries instead of three. There was always a funding objective in the sense that they now would be getting a greater percentage of their money, which we would define specifically, from sources other than AID and whatever their current sources of funds were, so they would be moving toward greater self-sufficiency.

Q: Did they? Were they able to carry on after the three to five-year period or did they have to have more grants?

SELLAR: Well, most of them got grants beyond that period. That, in fact, was sort of expected, because the initial grant was for such a short time frame that they could only meet intermediate objectives. Save the Children was by far the most successful. They really took the first grant and ran with it. Although initially they had to move their Program Director to another job and bring in a different person before they could get the grant approved, because the one they had was an old time humanitarian-oriented fellow who couldn't conceptualize the new emphasis on development. The head of Save the Children, David Guyer, recognized that he wasn't getting anywhere and brought in a young fellow right out of a Ph.D. program in management at Columbia, by the name of Charlie McCormack. When he came on we were able to get something done and get it approved. They really ran with the ball. Their program at that time was probably about five or six million dollars a year. It's been growing ever since then and it's now over a hundred and 10 million dollars a year. I think the quality of what they're doing is far higher than it was then, too.

Q: So, you really gave them a boost?

SELLAR: Yes, yes. They made the most of it. The YMCA did not pan out. I mean, it appeared to be a perfect organization to work with on this kind of a thing, because they were decentralized. They had their local chapters everywhere; they wanted to do things that were of interest and importance to the local community; they could get guidance from New York on the program. That was the way we set it up. Certain kinds of activities weren't agreed on between our criteria and theirs. But it just never went anywhere.

Q: Can you explain why one worked and the other didn't?

SELLAR: I think it was the leadership of the organization. And, also the fact that the YMCA priorities turned out really not to be as developmental as Save the Children's. I mean, your typical YMCA, as you may well know, interacts with its community in a symbiotic way, but primarily at the middle class level. Even though I spent time with one of them in Nigeria and some other countries as part of the program development process, taking a look at them, and it appeared that they would be able to do things and were eager to do things; but it just didn't happen.

Q: Maybe there was a philosophic difference between what you were trying to do and what they...?

SELLAR: Well, when I talked to the people in Nigeria, we talked about activities that were consistent with AID priorities. But I think maybe it was the New York personnel; they just weren't that effective; may have had many things on their plate, perhaps. I just don't know.

Q: You mentioned Africare as one you worked on. How did that work out?

SELLAR: I think that worked out pretty well. I think that they certainly worked out well in terms of their being able to go on continuing to attract new funding and then continue a program. How good the quality of their program is, I don't know. Technoserve was the other one. That was an organization founded by Ed Bullard, who in fact, had been a year ahead of me at Deerfield Academy. His intentions were the noblest. Most of his

support came from his church and probably from his own pocket. His idea was technology benefitting mankind. But the more he got into it, the more he realized that it wasn't technology so much as it was business training. What he did was, his modus operandi was to work with intermediate sized businesses in the countries where he saw it could work, and in hopes that his assistance could greatly enlarge these companies so they would become more profitable and hire more people. Job creation was really the primary justification for us. So, we were trying to measure the employment effect and we didn't find much. Some of the projects didn't work, some of them did. Very few of them really blossomed into anything really major. Meanwhile, they were applying very intensive assistance to these units.

Q: Did you understand why they didn't develop?

SELLAR: I can't give you a single answer to that, no. I don't think I was close enough to the program in the field. I don't think I will even try to answer that. It became pretty clear to me that it wasn't the most cost-effective model for developing small business and that some of the other organizations like Accion/AITEC and others, that were doing much smaller-sized funding with much less hands-on technical assistance, seemed to be more cost effective. Perhaps, doing training programs where whole groups of people were brought in was a better way of doing it, and using some of the local development banks that were credit unions or cooperatives. But Technoserve continues to this day, more or less at the same level. Ed Bullard died of cancer, but he ran it for a long, long time and it's still there. It finds enough interest in enough countries to keep itself going.

The other really interesting thing we did, in addition to the kinds of grants that I have described, was to actually help the private sector create a brand new organization, called Private Agencies Collaborating Together (PACT).

Q: That was created by your office?

SELLAR: By our office. I was the Project Officer who worked on it.

Q: What was the idea behind that?

SELLAR: The idea was primarily to create an AID window in the private sector to provide funds for all the development-oriented agencies that wanted funding for their programs who were simply too small for us to deal with. And second, to provide PACT with the capacity to provide the same kind of institutional development assistance to these smaller agencies that AID was providing to the larger ones. It was a way of wholesaling our assistance in addition to retailing it.

Q: Too small being what?

SELLAR: Just not enough of a program or not enough of a capability for us to help develop it without taking more time than our staff had. Heifer Project would be one example. Partnership for Productivity was another. This was, of course, innovative, too. It was the first time that AID had been able to give a grant to an outside organization for subgrants to other organizations. And that raised some eyebrows.

Q: That was quite a pioneering initiative, wasn't it?

SELLAR: Yes. There was some debate, but we were able to persuade people that it was okay and, in fact, there was no law against it. There was a legal question for a while, but finally we found the right lawyer who decided it wasn't a legal question. We simply needed to develop the criteria that would be used in approving projects, and the process that would be used. We jointly developed these with the people in the private sector who were taking the time to work on this. We got it worked out.

Q: This created a whole new organization then? Was there a group outside that was pressing for this?

SELLAR: That's right. There was a group outside that came to appreciate the desirability of doing this, when they realized that they were never going to get funding directly from AID.

Q: I see. It was the interest of the small PVO group?

SELLAR: That's right. Although Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a large agency, was also interested. The interested agencies put forth certain people as their leaders and spokesmen. There was one man in particular, Bob O'Brien, who had been a Jesuit priest originally, but had left the order. He had a PH.D. in physics, and was a very personable guy who became their real leader in working this up, and then became their first Executive Director.

Q: What were the scale of the subgrants? What kind of subprojects are you talking about?

SELLAR: Well, they were smaller. Anywhere I'd say from fifty thousand dollars to two or three hundred thousand probably, in that range. The projects were in most of the areas of AID technical assistance: agriculture, health, nutrition, community development, small business development, etc.

Q: They were very small.

SELLAR: Yes. Again, it was experimental. I mean, we established our objectives, but we didn't really know what would happen. But initially, PACT seemed to succeed very well. Membership grew. We had about six organizations initially that grew quite rapidly to 15 or 20 organizations. Not all of them, in fact, received project funding, because that wasn't the only function of PACT. The other function of PACT was to provide training to these organizations in terms of the kinds of things we've been talking about. How they institutionalized the program, not just run it forever; how to professionalize it in terms of evaluating results and so forth. They did that. But, what has happened now, is that PACT still exists today, but it has become a very different kind of organization. It no longer

makes grants. In fact, its objectives now, I believe, as I recall, are more to work solely with indigenous voluntary agencies on developing their capabilities.

Q: Is it overseas or in the U.S.?

SELLAR: Overseas.

Q: Then they can have a direct PVO type of operation.

SELLAR: Yes, and that's fine.

Q: They're not an obvious lobbyist for the PVO community? I'm not sure whether that's their role or not.

SELLAR: I don't think they are to any great extent. They may send somebody up on the Hill from time to time, but I think the American Council for Voluntary Foreign Assistance (ACVFA) is more important for that than PACT is. Because apparently, as time went by, it became generally perceived that PACT wasn't a substitute for AID funding, it was a competitor for AID funding. Some of their member organizations, as they grew, got direct AID funding as well as PACT funding. Then they saw PACT getting AID funding, which limited the pot for other PVOs. Anyway, what I'm told is, that as time went by they began to view PACT more as a competitor than as a resource. So that didn't work the way we expected it would.

Q: They got something started, but then funding faded out and they were not funded anymore?

SELLAR: PACT still gets AID funding for individual country programs and activities. In fact, it is still heavily dependent on AID funding, but it comes in a decentralized manner from individual countries rather than from a central office. That was also not anticipated.

Anyway, it was fun doing this work, because it was on the cutting edge. If you had any belief in the capabilities of PVOs to do good, professional work in the field at all, which a lot of people didn't and a lot of people still don't, it seemed like it was a worthwhile thing to be doing.

I think more than a quarter of AID's budget now is supposed to be spent on PVOs. So it's a very different environment today than it was then.

Q: What kind of attitude did you see in the PVO community in working with AID? How did they perceive AID and how did you perceive them?

SELLAR: That's an interesting question, because we, in fact, had a conference with them, which led to the decision to try to create PACT, at which we had a facilitator who was asking those kinds of questions with a piece of paper on one wall saying, this is the way AID perceives PVOs, these are the adjectives that AID uses to describe the PVO community. And a PVO piece of paper with PVO adjectives regarding AID.

Q: Do you remember any of those adjectives?

SELLAR: Yes. AID was seen as being very big, very inscrutable, hard to penetrate, arrogant, overbearing, but nevertheless trying to do something in development. Not as people-oriented as the PVOs were. The AID attitude toward PVOs was that they were small, weak, not very professional, and not delivering programs with any major impact, but certainly with their hearts in the right place in terms of what they were trying to do. I'm sure there's more, but that's all I recall.

Q: Have you sensed any real tension between the two perspectives?

SELLAR: There was.

Q: And you were in the middle of it, I guess?

SELLAR: Well, unfortunately, it was really John Ulinski who took the heat, not me. In fact, I remember one unfortunate scene at the end of a big conference.

Q: When was this conference?

SELLAR: I suppose it was '68, '69, sometime around there. Fairly early during my stay there, because then we spent at least a full year, maybe two, developing PACT after that.

Q: Were there other products beside PACT that grew out of that conference?

SELLAR: Well, there were the usual mutual assurances of good will and general assurances of willingness to work together. But the thing that I was going to say that reflected the tension was that, after it was all over, one of the PVO people looked John Ulinski in the eye and said, “Okay, John, now that we've gone through this process, which was your idea, how about it? When do we get a grant?” John came up with some carefully worded diplomatic reply, but it made him very angry and I can remember him chewing out the poor Division Chief for having allowed that situation to happen. The PVOs felt that AID was always putting them through their paces, and that they weren't getting anything in return.

Q: Did they have an American Council of Voluntary Agencies functioning at that time? What was that group?

SELLAR: They did, but they weren't playing a role in this, strangely enough. I think they were just doing what they traditionally did, registering agencies.

Q: That was their function?

SELLAR: Yes, that was one of their functions. That was their main function; some kind of due diligence review of the agencies, and registering them. Maintain the registry. And I think maybe they were the ones that implemented the ocean freight. I'm not sure about

that. And serve as a formal communications link between the PVO world and AID, and of course, help out on the Hill as needed.

Q: Were you involved with the Hill at all in this process?

SELLAR: I think we were, but not in any exceptional way. Only in the sense that when we put our Congressional Presentation forward every year, it had these things in it.

Q: What kind of attitude were you getting from the Hill?

SELLAR: I think it was supportive. I can't recall that anybody was violently against it, and I think some people thought that now we were moving in the right direction. Very slowly, but they were interested in this.

Q: Anything more on that experience? I think that's a very interesting perspective, because that has blossomed into a huge relationship in terms of the role of PVOs in development and AID resources.

SELLAR: I'd just mention one other thing, and that's just because I'm proud of it. I wrote a paper while I was there called, “Operation Pride,” a proposed program for improved local level planning and execution of integrated rural development. Integrated rural development was all the rage at this point.

Q: That's right.

SELLAR: Everybody was having a hard time figuring out how to do it well. What I did was basically suggest using community development organizations like Save the Children, or others if there were any that were good, to sort of glue all other technical agencies together at the local level. Obviously, government was involved also. I mean, one could argue that one should have local government gluing them all together, but in so many cases there really wasn't any local government to speak of, and what existed was not very development oriented. So, this paper was presented at the big conference we had with the

PVOs at one point. Not as an AID paper, but just as my personal think piece, along with other materials.

Q: What were your thoughts about integrated rural development at that time?

SELLAR: Well, I thought it was extremely hard to do. Again, too much of it was top down. It wasn't internalized at the local level. That was one of the main reasons why it didn't work very well. It was extremely hard to orchestrate all the different components of it, and therefore, for the most part it wasn't working very well. So that's why I wrote this paper.

Q: Your paper was to propose what? What were you trying to promote?

SELLAR: I was trying to promote a bottom-up form of rural development. It was really based on local communities determining their own priorities and then doing what they could themselves on the projects and calling in different private agencies and/or government agencies, as needed, to provide resources.

Q: And the PVO was supposed to be the...

SELLAR: The glue, the centerpiece. I wouldn't have thought that any PVO could do that, except that I was pretty impressed with what Save the Children was doing.

Q: Were they doing this?

SELLAR: No, not in any integrated sense. They were doing it in one way or another, here or there with a particular agency or another particular agency, more based on who was there and who they felt comfortable working with. But they picked up my paper and ran with it, as with their DPG, and decided that it would become their program model and used it as a central piece of their in house-training program.

Q: This is Save the Children, right?

SELLAR: Yes. I was credited by Charles McCormack with having basically provided them with a model for their program. It lasted for about 20 years.

Q: Well, we need to see if we can't put this paper in as an annex, because it's a seminal paper in this area?

SELLAR: Fine. I would be glad to do that. I'm sure it's in the files of CDIE somewhere.[See Annex A]

Q: If it is not too long for the annexes, one is able to spell out in more detail, a key philosophy and concept that got picked up. Were they picked up by AID or within the agency? What happened there?

SELLAR: Well, I got a lot of positive feedback within the agency, but it was set up to be implemented by the PVOs and I don't think anybody else would have picked it up. Most of the other agencies were the kind that would fit within it, in terms of doing small scale agriculture, health programs, training, whatever it might be. But, an organization like SCF was the one that really logically would be the coordinator. Africare might have done it; but SCF was really the only one that picked it up.

Q: What year was this paper?

SELLAR: It was in 1974.

Q: 1974, right in the beginning of the New Directions?

SELLAR: Yes.

Q: But did the agency pick it up in any way?

SELLAR: No. It never became an agency paper. In fact, Ulinski was very nervous about that, because he didn't even want AID shown on the cover.

Q: Why was that?

SELLAR: Because he wanted to make it clear that it was just one person's view as to how things might work, and it wasn't something that big AID was dictating or suggesting in a formal way to the PVOs. Otherwise, next year or in a few months they might all be coming in with proposals to do this. I said it was a draft for discussion and that opinions and recommendations made were by the author alone.

Q: Well, that's very interesting. Anything else on that experience, which obviously has been a very rich time for you?

SELLAR: No, I think that pretty well covers it, except that in addition to doing the work centrally with PACT and these other agencies, I was also the Africa Bureau liaison for the office. Each officer had a region with which he was the liaison.

Q: What did you do in that function?

SELLAR: Well, mostly traveled to a number of the Missions to look at what was already going on in the way of PVO programs, and broker between PVO resources and interests on the one hand and mission and host country needs and priorities on the other hand, to promote the idea to Missions of doing more with them.

Q: Did you travel in Africa then?

SELLAR: Yes. I got to go to quite a few countries doing that.

Q: What was the receptivity to that?

SELLAR: Well, everybody, of course was always polite.

Q: Well, that suggests that you didn't get as good a reception as you might hope for.

SELLAR: Well, it wasn't really fair to ask them to do anything specifically in the way of approving something. I guess that would be where the rubber would hit the road and you would be able to tell whether somebody really was receptive or not. They were just polite.

Q: How did you find the environment for promoting PVO activity?

SELLAR: Pretty good in most places. There were PVOs in virtually every country that were doing things that were worthwhile, but they were doing them in a small and often ineffective way. They needed institutional strengthening support to enable them to do more.

Q: How did you deal with the issue that a lot of development types say, well, it's all very nice to have PVOs and they do their little things, but in terms of having an impact on development, it's too small, it's just not sustainable, it doesn't grow, it doesn't whatever.... How do you respond to all of that?

SELLAR: Well, I think that there's a lot of truth to that, but on the other hand, we have a program like Accion that may seem small in any country, but, if there's a number of different communities in that country and 20 other countries, providing very small loans that are enabling people to get little businesses going, then there is a cumulative effect that does happen in fact. I think that the kinds of programs that Save the Children has been able to carry out in the last 25 years definitely had some impact. Maybe hard to aggregate the impact and, in many cases, they probably hadn't even tried to aggregate it. But I think it's there. I don't think it's the whole story as far as development needs are concerned, but I think it's part of the story.

Q: But part of that issue was how do you bring about a multiplier effect, rather than just have an isolated activity. Were you able to get some ideas about how that might be brought about?

SELLAR: That's what we were trying to do, basically in giving them the wherewithal to expand, not only their activities, but also their capacity to raise money to do more activities. And, in terms of sustainability, we made it clear from the start that the AID grant would end, so they were going to have to eventually be getting their funding from other sources and think about what those sources might be. In this regard, the U.S. corporate community turned out to be a big disappointment. PACT tried very hard to get meaningful support from them as a coordinating agency, but didn't get much. Churches were already doing a lot, but they often were more humanitarian oriented than developmental. So, it was not an easy thing to resolve. I think you can argue as long as the idea's around, it's okay to be providing long term support for some of these organizations if they're proved to be effective, particularly if you can get them to try to work themselves out of a job in terms of institutionalizing themselves locally. Some of them really accept that idea now and many do not.

Q: Did it happen?

SELLAR: Well, I think that's what PACT has been doing. Most of them will say, yes, yes, but, in fact, they really don't want to work themselves out of a job, because they're getting their emotional gratification from doing good.

Q: Good. Anything else in that area that you want to comment on?

SELLAR: I can't really think of anything.

Assigned to the Office of Middle East Affairs asSpecial Deputy for Joint Commissions - 1975

Q: Okay. So, you left that position then in 19..?

SELLAR: 1975. I was basically there for four years. It was time for me to move on, but in fact, it took one of these agency-wide events to make that happen, where they did a reclassification of all positions.

Q: Is this the Obey amendment?

SELLAR: No. This was just a.., I can't remember if it had a particular name. It was just basically a whole agency reclassification exercise. In terms not of Foreign Service versus Civil Service positions, but in terms of grade levels.

Q: Of the Civil Service?

SELLAR: I think it was just the Civil Service. Yes, they do these either on the Civil Service or on the Foreign Service side, I think. At that time, most of the jobs in AID/Washington were still classified as GS jobs anyway. My job was downgraded. I had been promoted while I was in the Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation to GS-15, which was frankly rather questionable, you know, as to whether I should have been classified at that level. But they went out of their way to get it done, because I was really getting a lot more done than most of the people in there. They knew eventually that somebody would offer me another job at a higher level. So, they did that, but in the reclassification exercise my job was knocked down to a 14; and, in fact, the exercise was kind of like a reduction in force (RIF). Everybody was then moved from one job into another. Somebody who was more senior was moved into my job.

Q: So, what happened?

SELLAR: I'm a little fuzzy on that. I think they did the reclassification, and, then, they had a RIF. As a result of these two things, I was reassigned by the Personnel Office to a different job, which was in the Office of Middle East Affairs as it was called then. The title of the job was Special Deputy for Joint Commissions. I really benefitted from these RIFs. I got bumped into better jobs than the ones I'd been in, for part of my career, though that wasn't

true at the end. This job was coordinating U.S. government participation in seven different Joint Commissions that had been established with Middle Eastern countries to broaden and deepen our relationships. This was an outgrowth of the Camp David accords, as a part of which special commissions were established with Egypt and Israel, and the desire of a lot of other Middle Eastern countries to have it demonstrated that we thought they were important too. It also happened in the wake of the tremendous oil discoveries in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

Q: There was a Joint Commission for each country?

SELLAR: Yes. There were seven of them all together, all Middle Eastern countries.

Q: Which countries, do you remember?

SELLAR: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, I think Tunisia, Oman. Everybody wanted one. I can't remember specifically, but I think the others were mostly the oil states, as well.

Q: I see. Linked to the oil?

SELLAR: Yes, it was, and to help

Q: Did it include Israel and Egypt?

SELLAR: Well, the Israel and Egypt Commissions existed already. So, I guess if we add them, then we're pretty close to seven. I don't think we had one with Syria, although I could be wrong. The areas of activities included technology, education, manpower training, cultural exchanges, agricultural development, trade and industry, and general economic and financial relationships.

Q: What was the makeup of the commission?

SELLAR: Well, it consisted of representatives from both sides, namely the U.S. government on one side and the Commission country on the other side. The makeup depended a great deal on what areas of joint interest there were to work on.

Q: Development focus?

SELLAR: Well, in some cases, not in all cases. In some cases there was more on developing trade and industry. But they were developmental in many cases. In some cases, Egypt for example, it was really a classic development program and the biggest one in the world, except it was run with Economic Support Funds (ESF), originally called Security Supporting Assistance funds. Egypt was pretty much purely developmental. Saudi Arabia was interesting, because they were attempting to jumpstart their country, jump it out of whatever century it was in (we used to say of Yemen that it was moving headlong out of the 12th century). Saudi Arabia was probably further along than that, but they needed development assistance. They had the money to pay for everything. Strangely enough, that Commission wound up being run by the Treasury Department. I'm not quite sure why that happened.

Q: It was a reimbursable aid program. Was that under the Joint Commission?

SELLAR: In the case of Saudi Arabia it was, yes. I'm sure there were some reimbursable aid programs that took place other than in Joint Commission countries, but Saudi Arabia was really the first major instance where that happened, I think.

Q: Was the Commission's function to select programs: what areas and how?

SELLAR: Yes, and then to actually help them procure the kinds of assistance they needed help with procuring.

Q: Who represented the U.S. on the Commission? What kind of people?

SELLAR: You'd have people from the Treasury; you'd have the AID person; you'd have a State Department person; you'd have a Commerce Department person; and then when you got into particular sectors, like agriculture, you'd have an AID agricultural person or a USDA person. It really was an AID operation, except that the Saudis were telling us what they wanted, because they were paying for it, and they were paying overhead, as well. So, anything they wanted to do

Q: Was it all officials from the U.S. government? Were there private sector representatives?

SELLAR: There was a private sector component. In many cases you would have lots of working groups under the official commission itself. I'm sure there were working groups that involved the private sector, as well as government, because they were building plants and getting into large agribusiness schemes. This wasn't being run by the Saudis. The scope of the program was huge.

Q: What does that mean?

SELLAR: It means that, in 1975, one activity cost as much as a billion dollars. That was not the kind of money that AID was use to dealing with on a project. In fact, I can remember a meeting that I went to with our engineers who were grappling with something that the Saudis wanted done, and they had worked out a tentative cost estimate. The meeting was with Bob Nooter, who at that point was head of the Middle East Bureau. The engineers were sort of openmouthed about the size and cost of this. Nooter, a cool customer said, “Hey, it's just a question of adding zeros.” In fact, the initiation of that program saved an entire large group of engineers that had been working on Vietnam from being put out on the streets.

Q: AID engineers were doing the work?

SELLAR: And a number of contract engineers. But, a lot of direct AID people were involved who otherwise would have been surplus after Vietnam.

Q: Who managed the Saudi Commission?

SELLAR: The Treasury Department.

Q: Why was that?

SELLAR: I think because of the very large financial scope of the relationship. Different agencies had the lead role in different Commissions, just depending on what the main focus and objectives of the Commission were. AID was the head of the Egypt Commission, while the State Department was the head of some, where it was kind of a mixed bag of things that were wanted. Commerce may have been in charge of some of them.

Q: I see. Was there an overall coordination mechanism for the Commissions?

SELLAR: There was. That's what my job was, as far as AID was concerned, to keep up with what was going on, and register AID inputs where appropriate.

Q: In all the Commissions?

SELLAR: Yes. And interact, interface with the other agencies. You know, points of view are not always identical between Treasury Department and AID, and State and AID, or Commerce and AID.

Q: But, the ones other than Saudi Arabia were funded by AID funds, rather than reimbursing AID?

SELLAR: It was both. Egypt, of course, was fully funded by AID, but there were others where, I think there was a mixture. I was only in the job for six months. It was very political.

Q: What kind of issues were you mainly having to deal with?

SELLAR: Well, it's hard for me to remember. Here's where I'd have to look at some of my efficiency reports. I don't think there were any major issues that couldn't get hashed out within the coordinating framework that we had. There were issues of turf in some cases, you know, as to who ought to be running this or that Commission. There were issues as to whether or not to establish a Commission with a country, because many of them wanted them. The State Department was happy to have everybody have one. We were more conservative about that at AID, because we saw that leading to aid programs in countries that we didn't want to go in to.

Q: Did you think it was a good idea? Did it work?

SELLAR: I think so. I have never seen any overall evaluation of the Joint Commission activity, but I know a lot of stuff got built and funded, and a lot of people got trained and so on in Saudi Arabia. Agriculture was very expensive, because they have these circular irrigation cranes, basically growing vegetables in the desert. I don't know how economic that was. But, certainly there was a tremendous amount of activity. Of course, the Egypt program. I don't know how to characterize that.

Q: Have the Commissions continued?

SELLAR: I think they tended to wither away. I don't know whether they formally still exist or not. I really can't say, because I was there for six months and then assigned once again to another job when there was a RIF. So I never looked back.

Q: These were essentially a political response to a political relationship that derived from the Egyptian/Israel accords?

SELLAR: Yes, political and economic and financial. I next went into the Office of Central American Affairs.

New assignment in the Office of Central American Affairs - 1975

Q: What year was this?

SELLAR: In the same year, 1975. I was in that Joint Commission Coordinator job for only six months and then there was a RIF. At that point, I think previously it had been the classification exercise that moved me. In this case, it was the RIF that moved me, because I was bumped by somebody who had more seniority, and I in turn, bumped someone who was of a lower grade than I was, despite the protest of the Latin America Bureau. This job was for some reason classified as a GS-14 job, as the Assistant Director for Development of the Office of Central American Affairs, which was a combined State-AID Office. It was a very interesting situation for me, it was sort of a quantum leap forward in terms of management and supervisory responsibility.

Q: In what way?

SELLAR: More than anything I had done since Guinea. In Guinea, I was in charge of half a dozen people in a diverse set of functions, but otherwise, I'd been operating more as a Loan Officer and PVO Officer. So this was a leap forward in the sense that I suddenly had four AID desks under me and four State Department desks that responded to me in certain ways and certain situations. This was the last remnant of the experiment that had been tried in the Latin American Bureau earlier, of combining all the State and AID Regional Offices. This was the only one that remained, and curiously, this was the only one that had ever been headed by an AID Officer. I think the reason for this was that State wanted one token AID Director and certainly the biggest thing going on in Central America at that time was aid. Dave Lazar was the Director when I moved in. He stayed for three months only and then went to another job and Mark Weissman came in to replace him.

Q: How did you find that back-to-back kind of relationship?

SELLAR: Well, I thought it was wonderful, because decisions got made so much faster. I remembered the situation in the Africa Bureau in particular, where we would write memos to each other and it would take weeks to reach a decision on something, whereas we could do it in an hour in this office. It was very much more efficient in that respect. Sure, you had differences in the perspectives of the State Officers and the AID Officers, but that was minimized by having AID Desks separate from State Desks. The joining of the two only occurred with me as the number three person in the office and the Deputy Director, who was a State person, and the Director.

Q: What was the situation in Central America when you joined up?

SELLAR: Well, we were putting a good deal of money into it, but I don't recall that there was anything really out of the ordinary. It was nothing like the Central America issue that took place later, which I was also involved in later. But, they were just poking along at different stages of development. Costa Rica well ahead of the others and Honduras probably bringing up the rear; and Guatemala with lots of problems with this sort of civil war going on in their northern border and a lot of people disappearing, human rights problems there and in other countries. Nicaragua having not gone communist at this point. Somoza was there. They had had an earthquake, which had destroyed most of Managua and there was a lot of effort being put into reconstruction of Managua. The programs were broad, in terms of the sectors that we were involved in. Pretty good sized programs, but nothing incredibly large; but I think that region has always gotten more funding per capita, that area and the Caribbean, than most parts oAID.

Q: What kind of issues did you have to deal with?

SELLAR: I spent a lot of time doing special assignments. I mean, I had ongoing supervisory responsibilities for the AID Desks. Basically just the usual issues of analyzing the program, deciding how much of it we wanted to support and then going to bat for it up the line through the approval process. I remember I got involved in and spent quite bit

of time steering one PL 480 Title II Program to the approval stage, getting that approved, which wasn't because I had any particular background, but there were some issues in connection with the program that I can't remember clearly that required somebody above and beyond the Desk Officer to work on it, and I did that. I also spent a lot of time on a special project that was a tripartite study with AID, the World Bank and IDB in doing assessments of the agricultural and rural sectors, both regionally and in the five individual countries. It was a big contract. Again, a lot of coordination was needed with the other agencies.

Q: Was it supposed to be promoting regional cooperation?

SELLAR: It was supposed to, both for regional cooperation and to identify those things that it made sense to do regionally, but also to provide the basis for knowing what the priorities were in the individual countries.

Q: Do you remember what came of that?

SELLAR: It was an ambitious study. Well, it got done. I cannot tell you to what extent it was truly internalized and used and helpful, because by then I had moved on again. I was only in this job for six months. The reason for that was that I had been a GS-15, but was bumped into a GS-14 job and only had a year to find another GS-15 job, or in fact, I would have been demoted. And with a resultant pay cut, which I didn't feel that I could take with a wife and two children to support. So after about six months I was offered the job as Chief of the Program Division in the Middle East Bureau, which was also the de facto Deputy Director, because there was no Deputy.

Q: For the Bureau?

SELLAR: For the Bureau, in the Office of Development Planning. That was a GS-15 position, so I took it. I did so somewhat reluctantly, because I not only liked the Central America office, but I also liked Latin America. I'd never been in Latin America previously;

never took Spanish in school, always took French, although I did manage to get myself to school for seven weeks in full time Spanish, at AID, because there was a period of time before the person I was bumping could be reassigned. So, they said, “well, we really don't know what to do with you until she's gone.”, so I suggested language training until they needed me. In fact, they were appealing the personnel action, although they didn't tell me that. But the appeal was denied, and seven weeks later the bumpee got herself moved to another office so I had to be yanked out of language school and put to work. It was a Washington job, not a field job. Just kind of an ad hoc arrangement for me to go do language training, which was great. I got to the one, one plus level, because with all the French I had had, Spanish was not that hard, but I didn't have enough time to really learn it well.

You were asking me about what particular issues I got involved in. Another thing they asked me to do was an ad hoc assignment. It couldn't be done by a Desk Officer, and Marv Weissman couldn't take the time to do it. They had a Central America Mission Directors Conference in Central America. They decided, maybe a couple of weeks before the conference, that they ought to have a draft regional strategy paper, so they asked me to write that. This wasn't quite as bad as being asked to do an agency communications policy the week after I arrived, but it was challenging. But I'd been there nearly six months, and I'd been through the whole region, so I was able to do it.

Q: You traveled through the region?

SELLAR: Yes, they sent me on a backbreaking trip through the whole region, because Lazar said that if I only went to a few countries the others would be insulted. So I had to go to them all in one trip. By the time I got to the sixth one, I wasn't sure which one I was in. It was one of those trips, but still, it did expose me to programs in the region and gave me some idea of the differences and similarities in countries and what the priorities were, so I was able to put together a draft strategy that everybody thought was pretty good.

Q: This was a regional strategy?

SELLAR: It was a draft regional strategy.

Q: Was there a ROCAP at that time?

SELLAR: Yes, ROCAP was part of it.

Q: Did they have a role in preparing the strategy?

SELLAR: No, other than to comment on what I was doing, because it had to be done so quickly.

Q: What was the point of having it?

SELLAR: Something for the Mission Directors to chew on. Something for them to begin to think about, perhaps in terms of dealing with the role of ROCAP versus the bilateral missions, which was always...

Q: Do you remember what you were trying to say?

SELLAR: No. I don't know if I even have a copy of it. I could look it over if I do.

Q: Well, there have been others who've talked about Central American economic integration and ROCAP and so on.

SELLAR: I don't think I even have a copy of it here. I may have it somewhere. I don't think it was really a significant contribution to those kinds of issues, because it was necessarily a fairly superficial paper and because I hadn't been steeped in the region long enough to really fully understand all the issues between ROCAP and the bilateral missions and their respective roles. I mean, I had some idea and I'm sure there was some reference to it in

the paper, but nothing in depth and it certainly didn't solve the problem, which continued on.

There's one thing, actually about the Latin American and Central American job, which I had forgotten about. You asked me about ROCAP and the relationship to the bilateral programs in terms of strategy and programs, and until I looked through my notes since our first meeting, I had totally forgotten that there actually was a strategy exercise at ROCAP to try to rationalize this and I went down and participated in it at the request of the Mission. I can't recall exactly what came out of it, but I know these exercises were periodic.

Q: What were the issues with ROCAP?

SELLAR: Well, really what would ROCAP do versus what would the Missions do. Problems of communication between ROCAP and all of the bilaterals. I think those were the main issues. The bilaterals, of course, would sometimes question the need for a ROCAP at all, but there were certain kinds of regional activities that it did make sense to handle regionally. The regional program could have been done out of Washington, but I think it was better to have it in the field where people working on it could talk to their counterparts in the regional institutions more frequently. That would not have been the case if they had worked out of Washington.

Q: So, after your Latin American experience you went to...?

Transfer to the Near East Program Office - 1976

SELLAR: I went to Near East DP and that was not because I wanted to, because I really liked Latin America and the Latin American Bureau and would have liked to have stayed, but I was in the situation where I had to move back into a GS-15 job within one year or lose the grade and lose the pay. Brad Langmaid offered me the job.

Q: He was the Head oDP at that time?

SELLAR: Yes. He offered me the job of Program Chief, which was also de facto Deputy, because he didn't have a Deputy. What I did was supervise on a daily basis about four program analysts and two budget analysts in reviewing and recommending disposition of projects and programs from 15 Middle Eastern, North African and European countries. The total budget was over two billion dollars. In time I also supervised the Bureau Controller when the Controller's functions were decentralized to some extent to the Regional Bureaus. And, somewhat unusually, I thereby had responsibility for analyzing operating expenses as well as program funds. And also staffing levels as well as program budgets, which was unusual.

Q: That's a big program to be reviewing and overseeing.

SELLAR: Well, it was certainly big in terms of the money. The fact is, many of them were rather small in terms of numbers of activities. Egypt, however, was huge and kept getting bigger and bigger. So, averaging those out, I guess you would say, yes it was a pretty big program. Spain, for example, was just basically a military base payment, and for Israel we just wrote them a check that accounted for a lot of money, but didn't require any programming.

Q: What kind of issues were you having to deal with?

SELLAR: Well, we had continuing issues with the State Department about the level of the ESF/SSA Programs. Originally, they'd been called Security Supporting Assistance. By now, I think they were called Economic Support Fund, which was a more indirect way of saying, politically motivated programs. There were two programming processes, AID's and State's. Most AID Bureaus had very little contact with the State process, nor did AID's Central Office of Policy and Program Coordination (PPC), because the ESF money was almost entirely, at that time, within the Near East Bureau. So we sort of had to discover how that programming process worked and how to interact with it. That was the way we often argued for different ESF levels than the State Department was arguing for. In any

case, Egypt and Israel were sort of sacrosanct. Those levels were pretty well set. But, in many cases, we were able to influence the levels going into some of the other countries, and we saw that as our job to try to hold those down, because to the extent those levels were held down, there would be more money for development assistance. Not necessarily in our Bureau, but worldwide. We sort of felt an obligation to the Agency to try to do that. I can remember one example that sticks in my mind where I got our Desk Officer, who was also an economist, to go to a meeting along the chain of what was called the SAPRWG process.

Q: What does that mean?

SELLAR: Security Assistance Program Working Group.

Q: I see. That was State and AID?

SELLAR: That was the State process. He was able to actually persuade them that Turkey needed 50 million dollars less than they were proposing. So that was a good day for AID.

Q: This was Turkey?

SELLAR: Yes.

Q: Do you know what grounds you based it on?

SELLAR: I can't remember the specific issues. Just that he had a different picture of the economy than they did and then argued that they didn't need that much.

Q: An economic balance of payments kind of analysis?

SELLAR: Exactly.

Q: Well what about, did you make any dent in the Egypt/Israel levels?

SELLAR: Well, no. We couldn't do that. Didn't even try. It was pretty well set by the Camp David Accords. So, the question there really was to try to use the money as effectively as possible in Egypt. As Langmaid liked to say, Egypt was the largest development assistance program in the world, because even though it was funded with ESF money, Egypt was an underdeveloped country and needed all the same kinds of help that you typically found in a less developed country. But, it was unusual in AID at that point to have so much money to work with. So we had engineers out there and lots of loan officers doing capital projects, on a grant basis, but nevertheless, capital projects that had pretty well died out in the rest of the Agency.

Q: Did you have any understanding of how those levels were originally arrived at and then became fixed in concrete?

SELLAR: No, I don't.

Q: How we ever got to that point?

SELLAR: I do not.

Q: I wonder. All right. Well, were you able to influence the allocations of these funds as to what they were used for?

SELLAR: Oh, yes. The interesting thing about State was that they were, I would say, about 98 percent concerned about the level and very little concerned about the content. Once the levels were established, they pretty much left it up to us to determine what to do within those levels.

Q: And how did you see that process working, the process of deciding?

SELLAR: That was done within the AID programming process in the same way that it was done worldwide. Annual program submissions would come in. They would be vetted by my

Office, the Desk and others. Based on inputs from everybody who looked at it, we would then develop an issues paper, then have a meeting with the Mission Director. The Bureau would make up its mind what it was going to recommend and then go forward to PPC.

Q: Did you have particular issues or recurrent issues about allocations toward particular sectors or types of projects? What kind of issues were you raising?

SELLAR: I don't think we had any highly significant differences in perceptions from the Mission. For one thing, Egypt blew up so quickly and so few people really knew anything about Egypt that it wasn't anything that most of us were able to bring much background to, so we relied heavily on consultant reports, feasibility studies. In a way, there was enough money to do everything, so it wasn't like a resource-scarce AID program where you really had to make decisions between the sectors.

Q: But, there were issues about, I guess, drawing down the funds once committed to projects? Did you have issues and things of that sort?

SELLAR: Oh, yes. But, those were no more severe in Egypt than anywhere else. I mean, once the Mission got built up, initially the problem was finding ways to authorize the money every year. I remember, in fact, the AID Representative when all this began was a fellow by the name oBill Templeton, a very nice guy. I'd known him in AID Washington. He invited me out to try to help formulate the initial strategy for Egypt and I had six days to do that.

Q: Do you remember what you were trying to do in your strategy?

SELLAR: No. All I remember is going into lots of empty offices where there were stacks of feasibility studies in the corner, because no furniture had arrived yet and no people had arrived to occupy the offices or read the studies. This was very early.

Q: What year was this?

SELLAR: I suppose this was probably '76, '77. Bill told me that he use to dread to go to work in the morning, because he would go into work and discover that Washington had given him another 50 million dollars which needed to be programmed by the end of the year, and he had no idea how he was going to do that.

Q: Was it mostly project aid or did you use commodity import programs, or what?

SELLAR: It was a combination. That was certainly one of the issues between us and the Egyptian government, as to how much of it would be balance of payments support and how much would be projects.

Q: What were they pushing for?

SELLAR: They wanted more of the balance of payments support and less of the projects. We thought that they needed more projects.

Q: Any particular thrust of the program that you remember that stood out in your mind?

SELLAR: Well, I think it was a pretty balanced program. Again, we were doing something in virtually every sector. Major education programs; major agricultural and rural development programs in the Delta. Big projects to build roads and rehabilitate roads and do something about congestion in Cairo. Low cost housing programs. Health programs, family planning programs. I mean, you name it and we were doing a lot of it.

Q: Did you have any time working with the Egyptian government?

SELLAR: I personally did not, except during this one visit when I met some of them.

Q: What was your sense of the rapport or the issues they were experiencing?

SELLAR: I think the rapport was pretty good. Politically, the rapport was excellent. The Ministers were probably better educated and more competent than the ones we would

be working within most countries. They definitely had their ideas as to what they wanted and how they wanted to do things. The problem was below the Ministerial level. You very rapidly ran into nothing, even though there were a lot of people sitting at desks.

Q: Well, what about some of the other countries that you were concerned within that office?

SELLAR: Actually, we had a couple of development assistance countries. I tended to concentrate on those. This is the way Langmaid wanted to do it. Initially, we had a very split, sort of schizophrenic situation in the office. Because with the Development Assistance countries, we had to take our tin cup and go begging to PPC for money and fight very hard for whatever money we could get, because the host countries were relatively advanced with the exception of Yemen. The advanced ones were Morocco and especially Tunisia. I think those were the only three. The rest of the program was ESF funded and there was never a question of getting enough money, it was just a question of, in fact, trying to hold the levels down, as I mentioned before. So Brad took that part. He gave me the hard part, the tin cup detail. But it made sense, because the ESF Programs were, of course, the most important. Yet the Development Assistance programs required a lot of time, because you had to have a totally separate budget and do all the same things in terms of programs and missions.

Q: What were the Development Assistance countries that you were working on?

SELLAR: Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. Yemen was a fascinating situation. I spent a good deal of time on it, because its needs were so great. It was sort of rushing headlong out of the fourteenth century, as people put it. It had been completely closed to the outside world for a long time and it had only recently opened up and allowed foreigners in and decided that it wanted to develop. So they needed everything, but we didn't have the budget to do everything there.

Q: What kind of program do you recall?

SELLAR: It was pretty heavily concentrated in agriculture and agricultural education. Some general education and training, participant training programs, as well. Also, there was an effort to stimulate the private sector. In fact, the Mission Director invited me out to put together a sector strategy for that.

Q: Was there a private sector?

SELLAR: There was, but there wasn't much of one.

Q: What kind of strategy were you trying to suggest?

SELLAR: Well, to be honest with you, I don't really remember much of the details. One thing that was notable about the private sector was the way egg operations sprung up everywhere. Egg farms, chicken farms. Once we provided them with some technical and managerial knowhow, they sprang up, so that gave you a clue that the Yemeni were inherently entrepreneurial and something could be done if you could eliminate the barriers. I think, as I recall, that it came down to the kind of customary problems of no laws on the books that would facilitate private enterprise and make contracts mean anything. No training facilities for people to learn business management. So those needed to be taken care of.

Q: What did you do in a situation where, for example, no laws on the book. Were we involved in trying to do something like that?

SELLAR: We would offer to help them, and draft the legislation.

Q: And we did that?

SELLAR: Sure, yes, we did that.

Q: And they had a system for applying the legislation?

SELLAR: Well, the next problem, of course, was enforcement.

Q: Not necessarily the custom to proceed that way, I guess?

SELLAR: Right. Extremely tribal country. The Northern tribes regarded themselves as being a law unto themselves, which in fact they were.

Q: Were there more aspects of the Yemen program that you had to deal with?

SELLAR: The only other thing I really remember is spending an awful lot of time working on the Title XII consortium of U.S. agricultural universities.

Q: What was that about?

SELLAR: Well, they had a very large Title XII program there. It was kind of out of control really.

Q: What is a Title XII program?

SELLAR: It was a consortium of U.S. agricultural land grant universities. Legislation had been passed by Congress to encourage us to do things under that title. It met resistance in a number of AID countries, but in Yemen it seemed like a natural, because they just had nothing. So they were trying to start a university there, among other things.

Q: Who was the consortium, do you know?

SELLAR: I can't remember the individual members, except that there were a lot of them. They were also doing everything: extension, research, starting the university. Sending people to the States for training.

Q: When you say they're out of control, what does that mean?

SELLAR: Well, neither we nor they really knew how much money they were spending, for example, in local currency, and what it was going for. So, I straightened that out. The Mission sent me a letter of commendation. Forced them to just keep books that would enable us to tell.

Q: This was local currency spent by their contract money or was it local currency generated through other programs?

SELLAR: My recollection is that it was local currency generated through other programs, which was assigned to this project. There were other programs going on that generated local currency - a big PL 480 Title II program.

Q: Did they get the university established?

SELLAR: They did, they did. How the research and extension turned out, I'm not sure. We had a problem, for one thing, with competing with the World Bank for personnel, because the Bank was out there doing a lot, too. Their favorite technique was to set up a special authority, which wasn't subject to Civil Service regulations, and then take anybody they wanted in the country, because they could pay them more. That was a problem.

Q: Do you know what the name was for that university? Do you remember what it was called?

SELLAR: Yes, the Agricultural College of Yemen.

Q: Is it still going as far as you know?

SELLAR: I really don't know, but I would expect that it is. I know there's been some political turmoil in the region, a question of North and South Yemen unifying and then

splitting apart again. But agriculture is absolutely basic to that economy, so I would imagine it is still going on.

Q: What about some of the other developments in other countries?

SELLAR: The others were much more developed than Yemen. We've already spoken about Tunisia a little bit. They were always on the verge of being graduated, and we were always having to defend the continued existence of the program. I promoted phaseout internally, but then when I was overruled, I would go forth and defend continuing it up the line.

Q: What argument were you making to discontinue the program?

SELLAR: Just that the money was needed elsewhere much more urgently, and what we were doing there was not all that important in terms of Tunisia's overall economy. We also often had difficulty with programs for lack of French-speaking personnel.

Q: Was there any particular focus of the program?

SELLAR: Again, a good deal of it was concerned with agriculture. We also helped with some planning assistance in the tourism sector, which appeared to be one of their most promising avenues. I think they discovered a little bed of oil at one point, which again, gave them a boost and made the continuation of the program more questionable.

Morocco was an interesting country. Great contrasts between the wealthy few and the mostly poor many. Great contrasts between the pretty sophisticated urban areas and the very undeveloped rural areas, particularly up in the mountains. But they had good farm land along the coast. I know we were working with them on wheat production and livestock. I can't remember too many of the specifics beyond that. There was PL 480 Title II, nutrition and health education and family planning.

Q: There was a political rationale program there at that time?

SELLAR: No. That was a development (DA) program. It was justifiable developmentally. Overall per capita income was sort of intermediate. It wasn't tremendously low, but it wasn't nearly as high as Tunisia or Costa Rica or some of the other advanced developing countries.

Q: How did you find your work in the Near Eastern Bureau? It was quite a difference from working in Latin America, I suppose.

SELLAR: Yes. I liked it in many ways. I found it very challenging. We were very busy, particularly because of Egypt. I didn't feel uncomfortable with my function since being a Program Officer was basically what I had been, and it was just a question of going back and doing that again in a much bigger program. The ESF aspect was different, and was bothersome at times in terms of levels, but I enjoyed the interaction with the State Department on that. In fact, one of my tasks was to go to the Assistant Secretary's morning staff meeting, which they held four mornings a week, and just be the AID person at that meeting in case there was anything to talk about. Mostly, I just listened and reported back to my superiors if there was anything that seemed significant. It was sort of fun, kind of sitting in the cockpit of history, if you will, since it was a period of major involvement in the Middle East. I think that our budget represented something like half or two-thirds of the Agency's budget. It was also challenging at times to serve as Acting Director. At these times I had to supervise the Economics Unit and the Evaluation Unit, as well, which were the other two units in the office. I had my ups and downs in the office in terms of perceptions of my performance, and I stayed too long. I was there for nine years.

Q: Nine years. That's a long time isn't it?

SELLAR: Yes, too long. But, the Obey amendment came along during those years.

Q: What was the intent of the Obey amendment?

SELLAR: As I understand it, the intent was to remedy an imbalance that had existed between GS and Foreign Service employees and remedy a situation where Foreign Service employees would have very responsible jobs in the field and then come back for a Washington assignment and be put into a much less responsible job, because all of the jobs in Washington were held by GS employees. They were designated as Civil Service jobs, and people would just kind of stay there and rise.

Q: They didn't rotate like the Foreign Service.

SELLAR: That's right. So there wasn't much room at the top. The Obey amendment overcame that by enabling AID to designate virtually all of their jobs in Washington as Foreign Service positions. It went even further and said that Foreign Service Officers could occupy GS positions, but not the reverse. GS persons couldn't occupy Foreign Service positions.

Q: So certain positions were designated Foreign Service?

SELLAR: Virtually all of them.

Q: All of them. All of the senior ones, I guess you're talking about?

SELLAR: At all levels. I mean, not the jobs in the support offices: the Contracting Office, the Controller's Office; but the program jobs certainly were. One exception was the Deputy DP Director jobs, which were kept as Civil Service. The rationale for that was that you needed continuity somewhere in the Bureaus and that was a good place to provide it.

Q: That affected you then?

SELLAR: That affected me, because I was in that job. Yet suddenly it became extremely difficult to find any other job. Even if one indicated a willingness to go overseas. In other

words, to convert to Foreign Service. It was extremely hard, because the claim was that Program Officer positions were always in surplus and therefore, they couldn't convert you or wouldn't convert you. You just weren't put into the rotation. You had to apply for the Foreign Service, basically as if you'd come in off the street, irrespective of however much experience you might have had, or as in my case, irrespective of the fact that I had already been in the Foreign Service at one point. The restrictions were very heavy. I think, frankly, it was a discriminatory application of the Obey amendment. The pendulum had swung too far, as so often is the case. There was a fair middle ground somewhere. Previously, it had been much too much in favor of GS, because after all, AID is a Foreign Service Agency. But it swung so far that it really did become discriminatory against civil servants. So I was sort of locked in concrete for that reason in Near East DP. The first five years or so were fine. I enjoyed working with Brad Langmaid, working for him. He was a graduate school classmate of mine. I didn't know him very well in graduate school, but he was very able and handled the staff very well.

Q: Were there significant changes in the circumstance and environment over those nine years?

SELLAR: I don't recall any major ones, except for the Obey amendment and then at the end, the basically hostile takeover of the Near East Bureau by the Asia Bureau. That's what eventually knocked the concrete off my feet.

Q: What was that plan?

SELLAR: I don't think it was so much a plan as it was a general tightening up. Of course, there were always tightening ups and so forth, but in this case, I really think it was because we had a clearly incompetent Assistant Administrator who for political reasons couldn't be fired. Also, during this period Brad Langmaid moved up to be the Deputy Assistant Administrator and he ran the Bureau and he was fine, except he was a little overcontrolling in terms of field programs. At least that was the perception. So the Egypt Mission was out

to get him and others may have been out to get him. And there was a movement, in fact, toward decentralization of authority to the field, which was needed. Langmaid was moved into a Central Bureau and never came back to a Regional Bureau. The joke was that the Assistant Administrator was fired for being incompetent and Langmaid was fired for being too competent.

Q: What years were these roughly?

SELLAR: This was toward the end of the period, as I recall, in the early '80s. The first major move toward decentralization, I think, was made by the Asia Bureau. It was called the Asia Bureau Experiment. That then became quite quickly, really without waiting to see if it worked in Asia, the new Agency model. Under that model Washington, which previously had reviewed project papers too often, could barely review them at all. We had three project approval stages, as you remember, for a long time. First we would review a Project Identification Document (PID), just a one-page sketch of what the project would be, as part of the overall program submission. Then, if authorized to proceed, the Mission would do something called a PRP, which I think was a Project Review Paper (PRP). Then, if that passed muster, they were authorized to do a full-fledged project paper (PP). So that was three times that the Missions had to come to Washington for approval. There were also other areas where they felt they were over controlled.

Q: What did you think about that procedure?

SELLAR: I thought that there needed to be some decentralization. I didn't have any problem with eliminating the intermediate stage, i.e. not seeing PRP's. Eliminating those was one of the first steps taken by Bob Nooter when he became Deputy Administrator. But, I think they went too far delegating project approval to the field, with the exception of Egypt, because those Missions didn't really have the accumulated knowledge and expertise that you could find in Washington. What really needed to be done was to delegate implementation authority to the field, in my view, not project approval authority,

and that wasn't done, because the Contract Officers and the Controller's Office remained central, even though a Mission would have Contracting Officers. The Missions may have had some authority. Usually they had Controllers in the Mission, but they were controlled from a Central Office in Washington. The impression I had is that implementation authority was never delegated to the same extent that approval authority was. I would have liked to continued to have seen project papers from Egypt. Once they got PID approval that was it. They could do the project design themselves. Also, at the PID stage, once the PRP was gone, you could decide to delegate authority to the Mission to approve the PP. It was up to the Assistant Administrator or whoever was chairing the review to make that decision. There was a lot of pressure on them to use that authority to the maximum, even though in some cases I don't think it was justified.

Q: Did they do it?

SELLAR: They did. Though not always.

Q: Do you remember the basis for not doing it?

SELLAR: Yes. Actually there were even written criteria. One of them was that if it was a particularly sensitive project politically, then there might be political ramifications that would be understood better in Washington than in the field. Another one was if it was a particularly complex project that might require some Washington expertise. And anything that was really breaking new ground in terms of something that the agency hadn't done before, would likely be reviewed in Washington. The grounds were, in that case, that we were going to have to explain it to Congress, so we needed to know about it.

Q: Do you know of an example of a project in that category?

SELLAR: Oh Lord, that's hard. I can't remember very many specific examples. I remember one Latin American project that was an environmental project that was very ambitious; there were all sorts of components in it and it involved a lot of money. If a project was

a very large project in relation to the portfolio in the program, I think that would also be grounds sometimes for bringing it back to Washington. So we asked to see that one.

Q: Any other examples of projects that might have been held back?

SELLAR: Frankly, at this point it's hard to think of any others.

Q: What were the new program interests or concerns that were being introduced that you had to cope with?

SELLAR: I think that environmental concerns were making progress during that period and we were doing a lot more environmental stuff by the end of this period than at the beginning. Initially, that was quite controversial. Economists tended to feel that would be uneconomic and might slow down the growth that we would otherwise achieve. However, the pressure for it was so strong; everybody else thought it was something that really needed to be dealt with, including people on the Hill. Again, there was a legislative mandate that we should do a certain amount. Most of us felt that we really should.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to single out about your work in that position? You were in a heavily process-oriented role in that position, moving project papers, which doesn't always seem so eventful, but is a major part of the businesHow did you feel about the process that you were having to go through? You've talked about various things. Overall?

SELLAR: I think it's too bad that we had to get funding authorization every year, which by the way I understand has not changed. I mean, every year we had to testify in detail before at least four committees for authorization and appropriation on the House and on the Senate sides. And, very often ad hoc special committees were also set up on one thing or another. Our job was to develop the briefing books that would support the Assistant Administrator or Deputy who was testifying. An enormous amount of time and effort went into that. Much too much. I think that's pretty well understood. I remember

Hubert Humphrey when he was alive, who was one of our sympathizers and supporters, came out one time with a stack of books about three feet high and said, this is what AID has to submit every year, I don't know how they have time to do any work. But, it was hard to streamline the Congressional submission, to get Congress to agree to streamline it, because it wasn't a popular program, and they needed to be able to tell our constituents that they'd reviewed every dollar. There was also a heavy load on doing Congressional Notifications which had to be sent up to the Hill constantly.

Q: Right. What was that requirement?

SELLAR: Well, basically if the project changed significantly in scope; if it became significantly modified and required extensions; if the costs rose considerably beyond what you had projected initially and presented to Congress initially, you would send up a Notification. Even if the total funding level had not changed, but the obligation amount within a given year was beyond what you had presented for that year, you would have to send up a one-page piece of paper to Congress describing the project again and justifying the change.

Q: Did you have many objections?

SELLAR: Not too many, but we had a huge number oNotifications that had to go up. Every now and then you would draw an objection. So, my job was to try to write the thing so well that they would just go down smoothly, and not draw objections. We were pretty successful with that, particularly with the ESF Programs, which Congress didn't scrutinize us closely as the DA. But it created a lot of work.

Q: Do you remember any type of objections or issues that they would raise, particularly?

SELLAR: They got into all sorts of issues. Sometimes it was policy based. Sometimes they were good questions. I can't really remember any specifics.

Q: There was no pattern?

SELLAR: Well, there were patterns at times, but I honestly can't tell you what they were. This was one aspect, though, of my being on the job for too long, because I paid very careful attention to these. At one time the Agency guidance had been very good on how to do them and I'd been involved in writing that. But, as time went by, it sort of slipped, and the guidance inadvertently changed and wasn't as good as it had been. I sort of held up to the original standards and made everybody rewrite certain sections of these things and made myself very unpopular in the process. I thought I was just upholding standards, but others viewed it as my being a rigid guy who was more concerned with paperwork than with running the program. So I was criticized for that toward the end. Probably justifiably so. I should have been more flexible in just going with the revised guidance.

Q: Do you remember how often you got objections from the Hill?

SELLAR: Not really that often. If I could have demonstrated that the quality of our notifications held the objections down, there might have been a better argument on my side, but in fact you couldn't demonstrate it.

Oh, I want to mention that I had some good training along the way. We've been just talking about my jobs.

Opportunities for training and field evaluations

Q: Right. What kind of training programs did you attend?

SELLAR: During the Near East job, when I was still considered to be executive potential, i.e. for moving up from the GS-15 job that I was in to the Senior Executive Service, I got to go to a management course at the Federal Executive Institute for three weeks. I found that very useful.

Q: What did the Institute focus on in that course?

SELLAR: Well, it was sort of an unusual course. It was run by psychologists, primarily. It had more to do with stress management and getting balance into your life, and effective time management, rather than management theories. Then, in addition to that course, back in 1969, long before I got to DP, I was able to take the intensive six-month economics course that they gave at the Foreign Service Institute, which was primarily intended for Foreign Service Officers to turn them into Economic Officers. Why they just didn't hire people with a background in economics, I don't know. They took one AID Officer every year into the course, and I got to go one year. That was very valuable for me, because, although I had had some economics in graduate school, a lot of it went in one ear and out the other, because I had had no basic grounding in it; the assumption was that you'd had basic economics, which I hadn't had.

Q: How was this course?

SELLAR: This course was excellent for me, because it didn't assume that you'd had any basic economics, so it began at the beginning.

Q: Very intensive, I suppose?

SELLAR: It was. It was six months of total immersion. They claimed that it was the equivalent of a Bachelor's Degree, just on the basis of the scores that people achieved at the end of the course on the graduate record exams.

Q: It covered all aspects of basic economics?

SELLAR: It did, and it had a section on economic development, which was actually the worst section.

Q: The worst section?

SELLAR: Yes, it was terrible. So bad, in fact, that the teacher who gave it, who was also the coordinator of the whole course, never gave it again. They went out and found somebody else. It was just divorced from reality. Even the Foreign Service Officers knew that.

Q: Not well informed, or what?

SELLAR: Just overly academic, not dealing with real-world issues. But, apart from that it was an excellent course. I felt much more confident and comfortable the rest of my career in AID having had that. Not that it turned me into an economist, but I at least became familiar with the concepts, was able to work with them, and knew the vocabulary.

The other course that I took, which was during my stint in the Near East Bureau in 1980, was a 12-week development studies course. This was an in-service course to basically broaden peoples' perspectives on development, especially narrow technicians. They brought in one very liberal political scientist and one anthropologist to teach that. So it was pretty interesting, because in many ways the course was sort of anti-development.

Q: Were there other aspects to the course?

SELLAR: Well, the anthropologists were very concerned that we never make an intervention until we understood that it wasn't going to destroy something, rather than help it, or destroy something somewhere else that we hadn't thought about. And, of course, many of our interventions and many of the World Bank interventions did that. They had lots of literature on examples of this - cautionary tales - which presumably helped us become aware of things to watch out for. The problem was, they didn't provide you with any suggestions on alternative approaches. The conclusion seemed to be that maybe it was better just not to do anything. This was not operationally practical.

Q: Right. But did it increase your receptivity to local cultures?

SELLAR: Yes. And gave me a chance to do some reading, that otherwise I never would have done.

Q: Was there any particular development theory or concept that they were promoting?

SELLAR: Well, I don't know that there was a single theory. I do remember that the Political Scientist was so liberal that a lot of people in AID when they found out what was going on were alarmed that he might be practically a Marxist. He wasn't really a Marxist, but he was very oriented toward equity issues. I can't remember specifically whether he supported the idea of the dependency theory school of economics or not, but he was probably sympathetic to it, and this, of course, went very much against the grain in AID, where I think the Economists tended to run policy probably to a great extent, and were a pretty conservative bunch. Anyway, those training opportunities were very useful.

I might also mention one other thing that I got to do during my stint in Near East DP, which was to lead an evaluation team to Nepal to study the impact of AID's education program there over the past 20 years. This was an initiative taken by Administrator Doug Bennet. In fact, I think it was probably his major initiative. He felt that more evaluations ought to be done by AID people themselves, rather than by contractors. He thought that, by pulling people out of Bureaus other than the one in which this project or program was being evaluated, he could insure objectivity. That probably wasn't true, but he thought it was. In any event, quite a series of impact evaluations were done with teams that were created in Bureaus other than the one in which the project was to be evaluated. I got to go to Nepal, and that was really a peak experience in my life.

Q: What did you find out about 20 years of education assistance in Nepal?

SELLAR: Well, we entitled the paper, “USAID Education Assistance to Nepal: a 20-Year Beginning.” That was because we found that the program had created schools and teachers out of nothing. There was virtually nothing to begin with and now there were

hundreds of schools spread throughout the country. The only problem was that there wasn't any equipment in the schools. The teachers tended to show up late, if they showed up at all. There wasn't any real monitoring or supervision. Even the most basic teaching materials just weren't there. So, it was kind of rote learning.

Q: Our program was mostly a school building program?

SELLAR: Well, it wasn't supposed to have been. It was supposed to have equipped the schools, and it was supposed to have provided education for a lot of the teachers in the country. The question, of course, is how can you segregate AID's impact from all the other donors and from what the host country was doing. Actually, that wasn't too difficult a question, because it turned out that virtually the entire education program, including the Ministry and everything else, had been supported with local currency that AID had accumulated in India through its vast Title I and Title II Programs, especially Title I. The currency had been sterilized, because it would have had a tremendous inflationary effect in India if it had been used. Taking a chunk of it and using it for this major program in Nepal didn't really put a dent in the Indian surplus, but it made all the difference in Nepal in terms of whether you could do anything or not.

Q: What was the impact of the program after 20 years?

SELLAR: I think the impact was that people were getting some basic education. This was creating some attitude changes that were positive for development. The education had positive impacts on the agricultural sector, family planning attitudes, and health practices, and was creating somewhat more equality and respect for women. We used a fairly standard questionnaire in all our interviews. When we got to Nepal there were three of us, and we formed ourselves into three teams of three by adding, first, a woman, since only the women could go into women's houses and talk to them; and second, a Nepali to each team so that we had the language capability. We then went to three different sections of the country and used essentially the same questionnaire. We realized there wouldn't be

enough interviews to make it statistically meaningful, but nevertheless it would give us more than an anecdotal idea what was happening. I got to go trekking in the Annapurna range, which was fabulous just as an experience, being out there and trekking for six days, and then finding the rural villages and visiting the schools.

Q: How did you go about measuring impact?

SELLAR: We just asked the people we interviewed questions like: did your training help you become a better teacher; what's the difference now in education here as opposed to 20 years ago; how would you characterize it? A combination of specific questions and open-ended questions. There hadn't really been any quantitative indicators set for the program in the first place.

Q: They didn't have any data base to work from?

SELLAR: No, which of course is a very common occurrence.

Q: Except, there would have been almost nothing there to begin with anyway.

SELLAR: Very little. We had some data on that. We also looked at the vocational education program. That was a real failure.

Q: Why was that?

SELLAR: Because nobody who graduated from vocational school went out and practiced those vocations. What, in fact, happened was, since it was the highest form of education in the country, the vocational schools were really seen as stepping stones to progress into white collar rather than blue collar occupations, and people were able to make that step. That hadn't been thought through in the beginning. As a result, the program really wasn't accomplishing what it meant to. Anyway, I just mentioned that as being one element of particular interest.

Q: Well, that became a regular official report of the evaluation system.

SELLAR: That's right. AID published all those impact evaluations in a series.

Q: What year was it published?

SELLAR: 1981.

Q: Did you meet with the Administrator? What was his reaction to what you were doing?

SELLAR: Yes, we did. As I recall, he was sort of noncommittal. One of the things that made this evaluation, I think, particularly interesting and important to him was that he was actually considering eliminating the education sector from AID. So this evaluation might have had some impact on that decision. It probably did. That was why the Chief of the Central AID Education Office made sure that he was one of the three members of the team. We came to the conclusion that there was much room for improvement in how we were doing education programs, but that enough was being achieved and it was such an important sector that it should be continued.

Q: Would you conclude that we established the first education program in Nepal in terms of ministry and structure and so on that they have been building on since then?

SELLAR: Yes, yes.

Q: But, it also suggests how long it takes to start from scratch.

SELLAR: And really accomplish something qualitatively, as well as quantitatively.

Q: Do you remember how large the student body grew over the 20 years?

SELLAR: I would have to look it up. I don't know. It was hundreds of thousands. I mean, it really was throughout the entire country. Of course, something would have happened even

if we hadn't done so much. The country was at the stage where if other donors had come forth with financing, maybe they would have accomplished something. But, as it was, we did it.

Q: Coming back to your regular Near East duties, how would you characterize your experience overall?

SELLAR: It was a job where I was continually caught up in the process of annual program and budget reviews and submissions to the Hill, and review of projects. You would just finish one cycle and then start another one. It was pretty repetitive, except for the occasions that I was Acting Director when I would also get to interact with the Evaluation Staff and the economists. I thought it was a very interesting period in the Middle East, though, and I was perfectly happy for the first five years at least. At that point, I think Langmaid moved up to Deputy Assistant Administrator and they brought in a series of other Foreign Service Officers into the DP Directorship job. I had mixed experiences working with them, depending on who they were. And it seemed as time went by they changed more and more frequently and became less and less competent. I had been in the job too long. I'd begun to grow sterile. I was probably a bit embittered by the Obey experience, as were many GS employees. So I think I probably stopped being as responsive and flexible and as much of a do-anything-I-can-to-help-out sort of person as I had been. I know that both of my final supervisors thought that I was contentious. One used the phrase, “mercurial relationships” with my staff and supervisors. I had some difficulties with staff toward the end of the period. People who just didn't think writing Congressional Presentations was worth anybody's time or attention.

I made a big mistake with one person. I tried to put into effect one of the things I thought I had learned during one of my management courses: different strokes for different folks, and that you should adapt the management style to the particular individual. This one seemed to be underperforming in view of his educational background. It seemed that he should be doing better. I thought he was lazy, so I started cracking the whip rather

than being supportive, and that didn't work at all. I know that I always worked best under supportive leadership. It would have been better if I'd just said, well, I'm really not capable of doing different styles, I'll just try to provide supportive leadership. I could indicate where things needed to be improved, but not really bear down on the person the way I did. It turned out that I had a terrible effect on him and he started having nightmares and sleepless nights. I learned of this from another person on the staff whom I'd asked to let me know how he was doing. This was the Controller, who was a wise old head and perceived what was happening. He was within my Division, but not within the program part. He told me this was happening, so I let up, but this guy, I think probably was very negative and vocal behind my back about my performances as supervisor. And there were some other complaints, although I had good relations with most of my staff and excellent relations with some. Overall I think I had a good record.

Q: Sure. Well, let's move on.

SELLAR: Yes, I suffered from that and as a result, when the Near East Bureau and the Asia Bureau were merged in 1985, I was not made a member of the management team that was created out of the two Bureaus. I was basically dropped.

Q: Did they create or integrate them or were they just two Bureaus with the same head?

SELLAR: They integrated the DP's completely. I think otherwise, they probably just added Desks. They probably integrated the Technical Office and the Capital Development Offices. That was a painful experience, particularly the way it was done. I mean, nobody even said thank you for nine years of hard work. I felt that I'd somehow become a pariah. Fortunately, at that point the Yemen Mission Director asked me to come out and do a TDY on developing a private sector strategy there, so that gave me something to do while I was waiting for placement in another job. And it was good for my morale, because he asked for me personally, despite the fact that I was not in the office that would normally do that job. Someone still appreciated me.

Returned to the LAC Bureau in the Program Office andthe Central American Initiative - 1985

While I was out there, Bill Wheeler, who was the head of LAC/DP, had a vacancy and asked me to come in as the Senior Analyst for Central America and as Special Assistant to him. He wanted to streamline and improve the management of office operations in certain ways. He was aware that we were doing things in the Near East in a much more streamlined way with regard to certain things then than they were in LAC. He wanted to know what they were and he, I think, needed a counterweight to the opposition to change of the Chief of the Program Division there, who'd been doing it the same way for 25 years. I got there a couple of years after the Central American Initiative had been established. Again, I seemed to have the good fortune to arrive in a program just when it was becoming, or shortly after it had become, a very important program.

Q: What was your understanding of the Central American Initiative?

SELLAR: That it was a major response to the possibility of the Central American countries becoming Communist. It was in response to what had happened in Nicaragua and was basically driven by a sort of domino theory. El Salvador was also very shaky. The initiative was to provide enough aid, and the kinds of aid, needed to keep Central America in the Western camp.

Q: This was in 19...?

SELLAR: The Initiative itself, I think began in 1983. That was when Reagan made a speech and Kissinger made a speech, which were the foundations for the new thrust and to some extent set forth the priorities Kissinger had articulated in a broad way. You know, it takes time for these things to build up. It was still building up when I got there.

Q: That was in 1985?

SELLAR: '85, and the office was still working on strategy papers. It had done one and they were doing a revised one, and I played a role in that and found it very interesting.

Q: What was the strategy you worked on?

SELLAR: I reviewed the whole paper and made my own inputs. Particularly, I debated with the economists what their targets were and whether they were realistic. They were promoting an export-driven strategy. The idea was to find higher value exports, particularly agribusiness, as opposed to lower value domestically consumed crops. Strawberries and cut flowers and things like that had sprung up to some extent and seemed promising for the North American market. The only question in my mind was whether there was really enough of that to create the employment and therefore the income that was needed to make a substantial difference. I don't think it did. I never got a good answer out of the economists on that. But, as in the Middle East, there were a lot of resources being applied to the program.

Q: What scale of program are you talking about?

SELLAR: At its peak, it was over a billion dollars a year, which in fact was about two-thirds of the Latin America Bureau budget. Now, it didn't stay at the peak forever, but it built up to that and began to slowly decline and then at a certain point dramatically declined. But it was fun being involved with such a high-profile program.

Q: What was the money mostly being spent on?

SELLAR: It was mostly spent on development programs with DA criteria being used, except for the balance of payments assistance components. Balance of payments assistance to El Salvador was enormous, since El Salvador was one of the countries in particular that we were worried about. Where in fact there was, I guess, a civil war going on, a low grade civil war. That type of aid was provided on the basis of balance of payments needs and certain growth objectives. Actually, it quite resembled the Vietnam

Program in the sense that we were looking for ways to win the minds and hearts of the El Salvador people in the villages. We didn't have people in every village, but we found ways to put money into every village for village-level projects, as well as doing things at the Ministerial level. And there was emphasis on agriculture and agribusiness and developing the private sector in all the countries. With Reagan coming in, this became a much more important element oAID's program, even though it had always been there to some degree or other. The housing program was still attempting to prove that it could do something.

Q: You sound skeptical about the housing program.

SELLAR: Yes. I can't say that I've ever seen a housing program in the field that I thought looked truly cost effective and sustainable, and I saw quite a few of them. It's possible that the one in Egypt may have worked.

In Central America there was also lots of training, an enormous amount of training. A huge scholarship program to bring people here, that actually was held up by the Congress at levels above what we would have wanted to do. Congress was very involved in this particular initiative.

Q: They thought the training in the U.S. was important?

SELLAR: Yes. And, they also felt that it benefitted universities in the States in which they were interested. So there were certain Congressmen who were particularly vocal about it. In fact, Georgetown University was the prime contractor, and Georgetown had its own connections on the Hill and lobbied for the training quite effectively.

Q: They did the processing of the participants?

SELLAR: Right. Most of them didn't go to Georgetown, but Georgetown would find appropriate places for them in other colleges.

We also had environmental programs. They were beginning to become significant. Just go down the AID's list of priority development activities: we did it all. Rural health programs and family planning to the maximum extent that we could function in the family planning area. We had lots of difficulties with that in Guatemala as I recall, but we would try to get the rural health system functioning better and hope that one would be able to do something with family planning within that context, even if it was only child spacing. What else? Do you want more?

Q: Well, no if you have some more we can add it or you can add it later if you like.

SELLAR: It was a broad DA program. The other thing that was interesting about it was that this was sort of the birth of the democracy program, the democracy initiative in AID, which was really kicked off by Reagan's speech in 1983 where he said, “we are going to promote democracy around the world.” So, since we had so much money to work with, and since one Assistant Administrator in particular who came in was very interested in that, particularly the administration of justice aspect of it. These projects began to spring up in ad hoc way. This was Jim Michel, a former State Department person, Ambassador to Guatemala, and a lawyer. Election observation teams were sent out, for example, to try to ensure that free and fair elections were held. In some cases there were human rights activities, which had always been around

Q: There wasn't any sort of coherent strategy for this?

SELLAR: Not initially.

Q: Ad hoc opportunities?

SELLAR: Initially. So these democracy strengthening activities were going on, too. In addition to my program review duties, I was given the democracy portfolio. A separate office had been created for this. Not even an office: it was just a staff unit for democracy. It was headed by an AID lawyer who thought this was more fun than being a lawyer, and

one or two people. They were developing regional programs, as well as backstopping the field. So there was a democracy program that became a unit like a Mission program that needed to be reviewed. Since most of it was taking place in Central America, I took that on, along with the Central American programs. Every year the democracy office would come in with their submission and every year I would say, “Where is your strategy?” They were so busy, you know, just trying to get projects going, particularly since Ambassador Michel would go home every weekend and think up some other new idea that he thought it would be fun to start, that they never got to the point of being able to develop a strategy until later. In a way I'm getting ahead of my story, because that was what I did next after five years in LAC/DP.

Q: What were the activities that Michel was pushing for?

SELLAR: Mostly in the administration of justice area, initially.

Q: What does that mean?

SELLAR: Improved court procedures; training of lawyers; attempts to revise the legal system where needed, particularly since most of the countries were operating with a Napoleonic code that was inadequate for private sector development. Mostly stuff like that.

Q: Did you have a sense of it having any impact?

SELLAR: It was just too early to decide whether there was any effect. Things were just getting started. And there was an issue of program proliferation, because by this time we were under heavy pressure to concentrate our program, because of overall budget and staff cuts. Yet here was Michel sort of opening up a new sector, so he had to do it quietly and carefully.

Q: It wasn't well received within the agency as a priority?

SELLAR: Eventually it was, but that's a story I can get into a little bit later. First, let me just finish talking about Central America. One of the most interesting things I did while I was there was codraft with the Chief Economist a revised regional development plan for the region. We did this when it became obvious that initially projected accomplishments were way behind schedule because the requested funding had not materialized. In revising the plan we actually did something which I'd never seen any other Bureau dare to do, which was to actually spell out quantified objectives for the Central American Initiative. We said, five years from now, if you give us this much money, we will have accomplished this and this. Sector by sector we established targets, as well as overall growth targets. Though I could never get them to put targets for employment, probably the single most important objective. Basically the thought was, to make a pact with Congress and commit ourselves to try to accomplish these things in the next five years if Congress would commit to providing a certain amount of funding. We went through a whole exercise with the Missions and ROCAP to develop this. The document was very well received on the Hill and helped hold up funding levels for a while, though not for the entire period.

Q: How did you reach these targets? How did you decide what the targets were?

SELLAR: Well, we would start by asking the Chief of each Technical Office to work with field Missions to establish them, so that in training it would be such and such and education would be such and such, and health would be such and such. Then, if they appeared inconsistent or if we thought maybe there were better indicators, we would suggest changes and go through an interactive process, finally reaching agreement. The economists did the work, the macro work. I spearheaded the work on the sectoral level objectives.

Q: Do you think the targets were realistic?

SELLAR: I think they were. They were somewhat conservative, because we really didn't want to be left hanging out there, you know, showing that we'd only achieved half of them.

But the whole thing sort of fell apart before it was finished, because the funding collapsed. So we were ultimately never held to account for them.

Q: How did the funding collapse?

SELLAR: It was because we won the Cold War. When did the Berlin Wall come down?

Q: 1988.

SELLAR: '88, exactly. I had always thought that winning the Cold War would be a wonderful thing and that AID would get more money to work with, because we'd be spending so much less on military and security assistance that we could do more on development assistance. But, of course, it didn't work that way at all. It turned out that the Congressional support for AID had depended very heavily on the security rationale. We'd always thought that it was a combination of the security-oriented people on the right with the humanitarian-oriented people on the left that enabled us to get a bill every year, but when the Wall came down and the Cold War was won, our budgets dropped drastically. Overnight, Congress wasn't concerned about the Soviet menace in Central America anymore, and the budgets reflected that.

Q: What do you mean dramatically? From what to what?

SELLAR: It would probably be, oh, from a peak of a billion to no more than two or three hundred million dollars. We had a phasedown schedule associated with the plan anyway, but we probably only got about half as much money as we had asked for and projected in our plan.

Q: Do you have any feel for the impact of the program for all that money?

SELLAR: I think it did have an impact while it was going on. There's no doubt about it.

Q: Was it just short term or did it have any lasting results?

SELLAR: You know, that's hard to say, because you know how it is in AID, when you go on to the next thing you never look back. There's bound to have been some lasting effects, but I never went back and tried to assess it. I never had the opportunity to do that.

Q: Any particular issues you had to address apart from what you have mentioned?

SELLAR: There was that issue with the economists about an employment objective. Also, I've mentioned that I was also made Special Assistant to the Office Director to streamline the programming system, just the documentation system. We did that, but it had to be debated and I had to persuade the existing Program Officer that we could do it, and demonstrate how it had been done in the Near East. This boiled down to things like sending out one budget allowance to the field for its entire program, rather than doling it out project by project as the year went by. We made that change in the Near East quite a while ago. When we did in Latin America, it saved about 250 budget allowances each year. It cut down on the scut work. Also, in the Near East we'd developed some rationale, which I can't remember the details of, for sending up fewer Congressional Notifications, and we applied that to LAC. That saved about 75 of those every year, which cut down on the paper work. That was really what they wanted me to do, and after that I really just spent my time on Central America.

Q: Were there any changes in delegations in that process?

SELLAR: No. The changes in delegation were coming about and had come about by virtue of the Asia Bureau experiment. That had already happened.

I did fine in LAC/DP and enjoyed it the first three years or so, and then a new Director came in who boasted that he was the only person in AID who read “The Washington Times” instead of “The Washington Post.” We had some disagreements, both substantive and stylistic.

Q: What was his main substantive interest?

SELLAR: Growth. As with the economists. He really didn't care about equity. Actually the funny thing is we didn't disagree that much, but when we did it was monumental. One area was the importance of environmental issues.

Q: Was he very private-sector oriented?

SELLAR: Oh, yes. He had originally been an agricultural economist. He'd been in AID for quite a while. He was private-sector oriented, but so was I. So there wasn't any particular disagreement there. I think he tended to magnify the areas that we did disagree in. My problem was, I was not as diplomatic about expressing the differences as I was earlier in my career. Again, carrying forward this notion of having been screwed by the Obey Amendment. Then toward the end of my stint in LAC/ DP, the office was decimated by a decision by the Assistant Administrator to wipe out most of the analyst positions and use them for, you can call it information, or you can call it propaganda. Basically it was to advance some younger folks who were working on data systems that would enable him to make a better presentation to Congress on accomplishments and impress people on the Hill. I saw that as being a sort of politicization of the Bureau. And, of course, I had to say that. That made the Director very angry, and of course it got to Michel, too. So, with the office being reorganized and changed in that fashion, I was tossed off in the corner as some sort of a strategist and found myself reporting to junior people, which was really insulting.

Assignment to work on democratic initiatives

Fortunately, at the time that this happened, the Office of Democratic Initiatives, which by then had become a true office, had gotten so tired of hearing me ask where their strategy was every year, that they said, “How about if you write it?”

Q: Where was this office of Democratic Initiates located?

SELLAR: It was in the LAC Bureau.

Q: In the Bureau, I see. It wasn't the central one?

SELLAR: Right. There was no central one at that time.

Q: Where did they report to?

SELLAR: The Assistant Administrator.

Q: Directly. I see.

SELLAR: Jim Michel. However, it had to go through the same programming process that the Missions did, but if they had a problem with any decisions reached at a lower level they could go to the AA and, in fact, they often did and, in fact, they usually won, because this was his baby. What happened was that DI, as we called it, the Office of Democratic Initiatives, decided that they really did need a strategy. They had a new Director who came in who was a pretty impressive lady in my opinion, Norma Parker, who decided that she needed a strategy and decided that she would like to ask DP if I could spend some time and do it, since I'd been involved with the program. She seemed to think that I could do it. Since I was at that point sinking into obscurity in DP, it was a good time for me and she asked for me to be detailed to her office for a few months to write this strategy, and DP agreed to that. And during the course of that, in fact she was able to get additional ceiling and invited me to transfer into her office, which I did with great relief. So I spent about six months writing the strategy, not all by myself, but with some consultant assistance, particularly on the chapter that had to do with Latin America's specifics. But mostly I wrote it myself and called it a Draft Democratic Regional Strategy Framework for Latin America.

Q: This was all of Latin America, not just Central America?

SELLAR: Right. The idea was that this would be a framework that would be applicable in any of the countries in terms of basic parameters for programs. Defining democracy, trying to define the requisites for democracy, and talking about the assets of and constraints to democratic consolidation in Latin America. There had been this wave already, what Sam Huntington calls the third wave of democratic development, and many of the countries had had elections, but were still very fragile as democracies. Then in the paper I set forth the proposed strategic framework, and the components of a program, which was basically organized into three areas of activities that would be acceptable. Making it clear that we didn't expect everybody to start all of them. In fact, suggesting the only way this fairly long list of activities could be incorporated into a country program would be by analysis of that country and its particular needs and priorities.

Q: What were the three areas?

SELLAR: They were, first, what is now called governance, basically more effective and more honest government. Second, civil society, which was a term that was unfamiliar to most people in AID, but was very common among political scientists and referred to the cluster of organizations that exist in democracies that are not themselves seeking power, not political parties, but that are existing for humanitarian purposes, for religious purposes, or for other purposes. In many cases to try to influence the State...

Q: Not the same as an NGO? We call them non-governmental organizations?

SELLAR: Yes, they'd be part of it, but not the entire thing. That's an actual issue that came up in AID from time to time and people began equating PVOs with civil society. In fact, it's more complicated than that. Civil society would include the press and universities, for example.

Q: What was the third area?

SELLAR: The third area was called improving the political culture, i.e. developing democratic values, which primarily meant civic education and any kinds of programs, including early childhood programs, that would emphasize democratic as opposed to authoritarian values and practices.

That's the way this paper was presented.

Q: Did you do any sort of research on democracy, as well as on the country situations? Were you able to write a strategy?

SELLAR: Yes, I had to. I didn't have any background in political science, although I did have a college major in American History and Literature, so I knew something about the development of democracy in this country. But I had to do a lot of reading. In fact, it took me six months to do that research and produce a draft. Quite a long time, quite a luxury to be given that amount of time as an AID employee.

Q: Did you have a group of people to work with on this?

SELLAR: I had a few people. Just based on the reading I did, I was able to identify a couple of political scientists who I thought were particularly good, and also, who were able to relate their theoretical work to reality in terms of translating it into programs.

Q: How about the Latin American contacts in which you're doing this?

SELLAR: That was in an area in which I was also weak, since I'd previously only had a short stint in the Central American Bureau. Well, I'd had five years in DP, but again that was all Central America. I had no South American experience, nor Caribbean, except I had gone to Haiti for a few days on vacation once. So I didn't even try to write that part of it. I had some thoughts on what it should say, but I sought Latin American experts to do that section. Actually, I only got it right with the third person whom I hired to take a crack at it.

Q: Who was that?

SELLAR: Her name was Esther Hannah. She teaches at Washington College or one of those colleges further South in Virginia. She was married to a guy who was working in AID/PPC, a political appointee. She was very good, I thought, and really did a good job.

Q: Dealing with Latin American contacts on democracy?

SELLAR: Right. She was a Latin America specialist. So, I finished the draft by May of '91. Interestingly enough, just to show how sometimes AID can operate without the left hand knowing what the right hand is doing, the Asia Bureau at virtually the same time was also preparing a strategy paper, but they were using an outside contracting firm to do it. Their paper emerged just about the same time ours did as the first two Bureau strategies for democracy. There were many similarities in the papers, which was encouraging.

Q: What happened to your strategy?

SELLAR: Well, it got used.

Q: Was it approved and all?

SELLAR: No, it wasn't approved, but it wasn't disapproved either. It created a firestorm of objections within the Bureau from some of our more conservative folks. Some were agricultural officers hopping up and down and complaining that I'd quoted from some left-wing Communist person and that therefore, nothing that that person ever said should be regarded as of value, as true. Again, my old boss in DP didn't like it at all.

Q: What were they objecting to?

SELLAR: Well, they were objecting, I think, in part just to the style of the introduction and to some things that were said in the paper that struck them as being too far to the left. To

me, it was just what had happened. I mean, it was just based on reading history, but they found it offensive.

Q: Any particular examples?

SELLAR: I may have not been as totally supportive in some cases of what we were doing in El Salvador and against Noriega as they wanted, but it was minor stuff really. I mean, the interesting thing is it's stuff that could easily have been changed without affecting the thrust of the paper. And we said, “Hey fellows, this is a draft. That's why we're here. We're here to have it reviewed.” But the DP Director got sort of apoplectic and felt that it should be taken out of our office and redone by somebody else. But the Assistant Administrator, whose vote after all was the one that really counted, had issues with it. He realized that these other things could be fixed easily, but he had a basic issue with it, because I argued that even though there had been this wave of democratic elections in Latin America, it was clear from the historical record that that had happened before and then democracy had failed to take root. And, therefore there was no assurance, in spite of the latest wave, that the countries were going to stay democratic. They were fragile and a number of things really needed to be done to consolidate the gains. Michel didn't like that. He wanted to present it as a much more positive picture. His concern was that if Congress read it my way, they would think that any money we put into this could go down the drain and therefore, why do it. I'd argued, and my office argued, that unless we indicated their weaknesses and vulnerabilities and deficits that needed to be dealt with, why have a program. We never agreed on that. He also objected to going into as much detail as we did in terms of our projections of funding levels and so forth. He didn't like that. Okay, fine, we said, we'll take that out. But, actually the paper had already been in use for at least three months before we got to the review, because consultants were going out to the field and saying, “What have you got? Give me a framework for what I'm doing.” So, with the permission of my Director I was giving them copies of whatever earlier draft I had when they needed it. Similarly, in the Missions, those who picked up on it wanted it and were using it and we did send it to the Missions, of course, for review and comment

before we went to this final meeting, and the Missions didn't have any problems with it. The Missions liked it. Two of them, in fact said that it was the best strategy paper they'd ever seen, which was gratifying, and Michel knew that. So, what he did was say, “Well, just go on working with it.”

Q: Not face the issue?

SELLAR: That's right. Just keep calling it a draft. We're not going to approve it, but we're not going to disapprove it. Time to get on with it, let's go ahead; and that's what we did.

Q: Anything more to bring out the issues and substance or the strategy that you were having to respond to?

SELLAR: The first issue was what we should be doing and what we should not be doing. We came up with a list of about a dozen things that we thought ought to be done. The first items were in the governance area. Under strengthening governance, we called for strengthening the competence of political and government institutions, and under that, strengthening the rule of law, which was already going on through the Administration of Justice Program; but we also added to that strengthening adherence to internationally recognized human rights; and implementing new initiatives to strengthen property rights. This focused on improving the legal and regulatory climate for business, and for titling land and property. Now, strictly speaking, that's not really part of the democracy program, but if we're going to have lawyers out there, working on improving the process as a whole, it made sense to do that too. This was an issue: some people felt it was in fact development that would produce democracy. Other people felt that democracy would produce development. That's the way AID argued it, both ways. All the literature said that development would, in fact improve democracy, but there was no evidence for the reverse. In any event, this was really more of a private sector initiative, but just made sense to put it there since it was law. There was a private sector office too and we would try to work with them.

The second item was strengthening the electoral processes by providing technical assistance to the creation of functioning, credible electoral commissions, voter registration programs, and international observer teams. We worked through established regional organizations as much as possible to avoid too strong a U.S. presence in these activities, which of course not long ago had been unthinkable, too political to get involved in. There was a lot of controversy as the democracy initiative turned into a program between those who felt that AID should get involved in it and those who felt that we shouldn't, since AID had always been thought of, and thought of itself as a technical organization, even though of course any intervention you make has political/economic consequences. AID had wanted to stay out of anything overtly political so they didn't get tainted with being partisan, with being identified too closely with one administration or another, so they could go on developing the institutions, and programs they were trying to develop. So, many people felt that democracy was just something that AID shouldn't get into and particularly working on elections. But, in fact, the election observation teams and related technical assistance were one of the most successful parts of the program. It didn't encounter resistance at all.

The final part of the government activities, very bluntly stated, was improve the honesty and competence of the executive branches through continuation and expansion of a financial management project, which involved putting a GAO-type person into the ministries, and initiation of activities to improve generally the efficiency and effectiveness of government in key areas, which was actually a way of trying to reform the administrative culture. Now, that is an issue too, because that gets you back into the area of public administration, which had been generally throughout the agency perceived as a program that had failed and that we were not going to try to do again. So, actually, part of the strategy paper deals with that issue. It talks about why the earlier effort had failed and how we would do it differently this time and why it was important.

Q: Why did it fail?

SELLAR: Well, my understanding is that it was because it was too academic. We would bring advisors out of public administration schools, or we would set up schools of public administration in some cases that just really weren't focused on the real problems. The real problems were usually much more basic than the rather elaborate areas of institutional development and whatnot, that public administration professors are fond of. Also, I don't think it was ever recognized that in some cases there were successes. I mean, there was a very successful school of public administration in Latin America, as a matter of fact.

But, that was the exception to the rule. A fourth item was strengthening decentralization and devolution of power through expanded assistance to local municipal governments. This was sort of a given in AID that that was a good thing too. In fact, the literature presents mixed evidence; there are arguments for and against it. But we decided that we were for it and that we were going to do it.

Another item was to strengthen civilian control of the military. Again, this was an area where people said, how in the world can you touch that? But we did it in a subtle enough way that it worked, through support of dialogues on improving civilian and military agreement on appropriate roles for the military and new measures to reduce military autonomy. Of course, the big, big problem in Latin America was the power of the army. But by having non-threatening seminars and so forth, initially you could begin to get at some of the issues.

A sixth item was strengthening legislatures, through technical assistance and training, and to strengthen their analytic and oversight capabilities. For the most part they tended to be very weak rubber-stamp types of organizations.

Seventh was strengthening political parties, primarily by working through the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, and by supporting programs of the National Endowment for Democracy where needed.

This all was what we included under the first element of the strategy: governance. The second element was helping create a vigorous, autonomous civil society. Under that we had first, strengthening alternative opinion and information sources, including continued support for a regional journalism project which had been started, and distribution of textbooks and a new initiative to strengthen think tanks. The next item was strengthening civic, professional and community organizations, and continuing support for free, democratically oriented labor unions. This latter project had been operating for 20 years and was regarded as an entitlement program with virtually no oversight. It was operated out of a regional projects office in LAC/DP. Part of the deal in my going from DP to DI was that the labor project would be transferred with me, and I would manage it. DP saw an opportunity to get rid of it. So that was an interesting part of my job, as well as the customary program officer stuff. The third element of the strategy was strengthening democratic values and leadership. That included expanding support for formal and non-formal civic education programs; continuing support for leadership training programs through CLASP (Central and Latin American Scholarship Program), which was the huge umbrella for participant training programs through various universities; and support of other organizations that strengthen democratic values and skills. Finally we said we would support other innovative approaches on a pilot basis and replicate them when found effective, a sort of “miscellaneous other” category to give us flexibility. That was the substance of the strategy framework.

Q: What areas did you and the Missions work in, commonly?

SELLAR: Well, we got into practically all of them.

Q: Did they have to do a democracy assessment in each country?

SELLAR: Yes. We helped the Missions with that. In fact, we prepared a draft Assessment Handbook, got that done by 1992, which helped the consults and missions ask the right questions under those different categories. It didn't help decide which categories ought to

be given higher priority than others. There just wasn't any research that would enable you to do that. In fact, we held a series of seminars with the National Academy of Sciences that coordinated and brought in academics. This was global, not just for Latin America. We engaged with each other and learned about each other, and it was helpful. One of the seminars was devoted to the question, could priorities be created, recognizing that what we had was a framework, but that was all it was. It didn't enable you to recognize or sequence the activities and it didn't enable you to know very much about the causality of problems.

Q: What was the reception to all this strategizing and approach to strengthening democracy by the Latin American country governments?

SELLAR: Oh, I think they were eager to have it. In many cases you had strong reform movements or even reformist presidents as a result of the wave of elections that had occurred. In several cases the military had sort of given up or been persuaded to go back to the barracks and let the civilians try, because the military had done so poorly. So there was receptivity.

Q: Any country that stood out as picking it up and running with it?

SELLAR: I think it was strongest initially, in Central America, just because that's where it had gotten started. There were significant resources to apply there even after the later budget cuts. Most of our South American programs had very little money to work with, but they did get into it also. There was a special program in Colombia, dealing with training police and trying to help them deal with their drugs problem. Guatemala was a program that comes to mind. Not necessarily because they picked it up and ran with it any more than the others, but because it was one of the early experiments, and we did quite a bit to try to reform the judicial system. This really didn't work. You could achieve all kinds of technical improvements and you could give them new desks and word processors and air conditioners and cars and so forth, and get libraries set up and organized, but

Q: I suppose the toughest problem would be dealing with the business of instituting values or changing values and so on. How did you find that worked and what did you do?

SELLAR: Well, yes, that was the toughest challenge, because that's the longest-term part of the program. You can't really expect to see too much impact until you get to the next generation. But we were invited to help them revise their curriculum in their civics textbooks, or whatever they were called. Most of them that I saw were just hopelessly unrealistic. For example, in El Salvador, which was practically like Vietnam, the books had shining, smiling faces describing this ideal system. Nobody would find it credible. In Nicaragua, the history books and texts had all been written by the communist-oriented regime. So everything Communist was good and everything U.S. was bad. That had to be revised and the new government invited us to do that. We had a major textbook revision program there. In cases where we couldn't or didn't have the resources in the Mission to penetrate the formal education system, we tried to do informal courses. There was a PVO program that we got started with Partners of the Americas that was a pilot effort in a few countries to start working on civic education with local NGOs and anybody else they could find to work with. That was very hard to get approved, because again the conservative element in the Bureau felt it was messing with people's values, “social engineering” a pejorative term, and didn't think that such a program would be well received. But, in fact the pilot program caught on like wildfire. The last time I talked with the President of the organization...

Q: Which one?

SELLAR: Partners of the Americas. The initial small grant that started them, a million or two, had already resulted in over four million dollars in mission add-ons. And that was quite quickly. So there was a need for it and a demand for it.

Q: What did they do particularly in the field?

SELLAR: I don't know, other than develop civic education programs. In many cases, I'm sure it was integrated into things that they were already doing with these local NGOs. You're familiar with the Partnership program: they had extensive contacts in every country. You could go right to work..

So the strategy paper, although formally never approved, was I think successful and useful, as was the Assessments Handbook.

Q: Maybe you want to consider adding it as an annex?

SELLAR: Well, I can attach whatever you want. [See Annexes B and C.] But, these are not short pieces. One other thing that happened was that the Caribbean countries, the British Commonwealth countries who had not been included in the Latin American strategy, asked for their own strategy paper. This was because in terms of generalities, Haiti was a part of the Latin American strategy, and so was the Dominican Republic, but the Anglophone countries had much stronger democratic traditions and very different cultural and historical backgrounds. They were much better functioning democracies. We had Missions in Jamaica and a Regional Mission in Barbados and they both said, hey, what about us. The Latin America strategy is good for all these other countries, but it doesn't apply to ours. So that gave me the opportunity to make a nice trip to the Caribbean with one of my favorite political science consultants. We did a proposed strategy for them which was not nearly as extensive or intensive as the first paper, and didn't really contain any new elements, but tried to narrow them down a bit and place them in the context of democracies that were already thriving for the most part. Although there were some that were a little shaky, like Grenada. So, we did that strategy paper, in a ridiculously short period of time. [See Annex D.]

Q: Was that picked up and supported?

SELLAR: Yes, the Missions liked it and I'm sure they used it. Since it was for the Missions, it didn't have to be approved in Washington. No one raised the kinds of issues that had been raised with the first paper.

So, other than the strategy work, I was functioning as the office's Program Officer, which they really hadn't had before I arrived. And consequently they had been kind of the laughing stock of the Bureau when they got to their program reviews, because they didn't have the numbers right. They would sit there and argue with each other about what the numbers were and just generally didn't present themselves as being organized at all, which they weren't. So I just put in the procedures that one needs to put in to get submissions on time and get the Director to make it clear that he wants material prepared on time, which they really weren't use to doing. And analyze basic financial concepts such as making sure that your estimated expenditures didn't add up to more than the project authorization level.

Q: These were project proposals?

SELLAR: That's right. In some cases, we were developing new regional projects.

Q: You had your own funds, as well as Mission funds?

SELLAR: We did. A number of our activities had started regionally, and it made sense to do a number of them regionally, to provide expertise and resources. Human rights, for example, is one area that comes to mind, where we could have one regional project instead of having a whole bunch of little mini bilateral projects. It was much more efficient to manage. The journalism project was regional, a pretty substantial project.

Q: Then the Missions would draw on it for particular country activities?

SELLAR: Exactly. And they would all have buy-in provisions, so if the Missions wanted to do something larger than the regional project would allow they could just use it as the

framework to create their own activity. This was particularly helpful to the Missions that were attempting to start democracy programs with very limited staff time and expertise. We really didn't run into any difficulty while I was there in terms of the usual tension between regional or global and bilateral programs in competing for funding.

Q: How long were you there?

SELLAR: I was there until I retired, which is to say from 1990 to 1993.

I might also mention another paper that I wrote while I was still in DP, but that had to do with DI. Jim Michel needed something that he could use on the Hill to defend his democratic initiatives and to promote the idea of strengthening democracy in the region, so he asked for a paper that would describe our experience to date. I wrote that, based heavily on input from Norma Parker and Roma McKnee, who were veterans in the DI Office. Norma was the Director and Roma was one of the Project Officers. Of course, we put a positive spin on it.

Q: This was an attempt to show that the programs were working, that they were having results?

SELLAR: Yes. Not in every case. I mean, we were reasonably honest. Also, I think we conveyed that it was still too early to say definitively, but the early results were encouraging in different ways, and that we were learning lessons about how not to do things as well as how to do them. We gave some examples of that. So that made the paper appear to be objective, and gave it credibility. Jim Michael was very happy with that paper and used it on the Hill, and said that it helped a lot. He was a very persuasive guy, with or without a paper, but the paper was something you could read when he wasn't around.

Q: Well, maybe it's also something we would like to attach.

SELLAR: Maybe so, since it's not as thick as the others. [See Annex E.] According to Michel, it was significant in terms of persuading the Hill not to object to and even to support the democracy initiative.

Q: Did it have any particular thrust or was it just covering the whole range of programs?

SELLAR: It covered the range of programs that we had been doing up to that point.

Q: What worked and what didn't?

SELLAR: Right. I went back and started as early as '61 and talked about Title IX a little bit, how that was the precursor to the Initiative. Then the programs from '78 to '96. There actually was an earmark from Congress in '84 for one million dollars for administration of justice in El Salvador, so obviously there was Congressional as well as executive branch interest.

In the three years that I was there, doing the things that I described, I also managed the AIFLD Program, which had about six or eight million dollars a year going into 20 countries when I got it. Much too much money really in relationship to the total program. And we didn't know anything about what was happening or being accomplished.

Q: This was the Labor Program?

SELLAR: Right. They had never really been asked to justify themselves. This was because President Kennedy had reportedly made a commitment in 1963 to a certain annual level of support. So it just went on year after year, with little if any AID influence over it. But in the new environment that we were in, in terms of resource scarcity, and with the winning of the Cold War in particular, a situation had been created in which Labor knew that, since their program was very much to counter Communist influence in the unions, they were probably going to have to take some reductions, and the opportunity existed for me to rationalize their program. So I worked on that, and we actually developed

the first logical framework (log frame) for the program, on a country basis, that had ever been done, and we agreed on a slow reduction in their annual funding together with some targets and objectives.

Q: Did the logframe change the purpose of what they were trying to do?

SELLAR: Well, I don't know that it really changed it, but it clarified it, and I think it forced them to do a lot of thinking about what they were doing themselves, that probably changed things to some degree, just in terms of clarifying and possibly narrowing the scope of their activities. I mean, the very act of doing this, as you know, is often helpful to the person doing it, as much as to the person it is being done for. So we got that done, and included targets for increasing local cost contributions, which they had never bothered to try to do. This was all worked out and we were getting compliments about it from the reviewing officers, and everybody was happy with it. Unfortunately, I think in about the second year it just all fell apart when the Bureau's funding dropped precipitously. That was after I'd left.

I also worked on developing some projects. One was the civic education and citizen participation project with the Partners that I mentioned. I also worked on developing a civil-military relations projects as a follow-on to the initial activity, which was just basically a couple of seminars. I also developed a technical support project, which was something that I'd learned to do in the Near East Bureau. This was extremely useful. It's not really a project, it's a pot of funding for a collection of activities. It enables you to do studies, evaluations, all the kinds of things that you have to do, and pay for them with program funds. We threw everything but the kitchen sink into it. Limited training, limited preapproval project activity.

Q: That was a common pattern in many Bureaus at the time.

SELLAR: Yes, and we did it for our program as well. It was helpful in enabling us to get people out to the field more quickly. Contract people and so forth. And provide more rapid response time. We used it to do a comprehensive evaluation of the AIFLD program,

the first time that had ever been done in 32 years. Out of that we formulated a labor development strategy jointly with them.

Those were my main activities. I was also the LAC representative to an agency working group that became known as the Tuesday Group; it met every Tuesday to try to bring some semblance of coordination and similarity to what the different Regional Bureaus were doing in this new sector, democracy. There were all sorts of debates and things that had to be thrashed out. That was fun. We also wrote an Agency policy paper for Democracy and Governance, as it was called.

Q: So, your work was as a pioneer, providing a basis for the overall agency strategy?

SELLAR: It was. Ours and the Asia Bureau strategy. The situation was very different in the different Bureaus. Africa was particularly resistant to getting into democracy work. They felt that, my God, they were dealing with terrible problems of poverty. They didn't have enough money even for that, and they felt one needed to reach a certain level of development before you started concerning yourself with democracy. People had to eat first. There was some justification to this viewpoint in the African context, I thought. Then, of course, Eastern Europe and Russia and the former Soviet Union countries came along.

Q: Was that the kind of strategy that basically you had laid out?

SELLAR: I expect it is, although I'm not sure. I saw something the other day that described a different document as being the basis, an agency strategy paper or something. If so, it has been redone and I haven't seen it. But, I would doubt that it changed too much, because I used to also do training sessions at the Development Studies Program (DSP). They incorporated a democracy and governance section into their overall development studies program. I would go over and do that sometimes, or get two or three people and we'd go over and do it as a panel. I also did a couple of consulting jobs for AID after I retired that were both democracy-related, in 1994, and then stayed in touch a bit beyond that; and whenever I'd see anybody, they'd say that nothing much had changed. In fact,

one of them called and said, “We had another major issue between a so-called political scientist and a political economist, and their approach was quite different.” Ours was a political science approach. The political economists were looking at things in a much shorter term, but they had the virtue of taking into account what the political economy of the country was, perhaps to a greater extent than we did. It would have been a good idea to merge the two approaches, except that their conclusions were very different in terms of what program priorities ought to be.

Q: What were they deciding?

SELLAR: Well, having said that, now let's see if I can remember. For some reason, I don't know why it was, they didn't believe in doing civic education at all. They didn't believe that values could be changed, even with a new generation. I don't understand why that was, but I felt that was a real limitation in their perspective. Their perspective was also shorter term, more focused on doing things that would immediately affect the political economy of the situation. That debate never got resolved. I was invited to come and sort of redo the debate for the benefit of one Bureau at a conference for democracy officers, and I said, “Well, I've been gone for three years.” The person calling me said, “Don't worry, nothing has changed at all.” Now I've been gone for five and a half years.

Q: So you retired in 1993?

SELLAR: That's right.

Post USAID activity

Q: Did you do any AID-related work after retiring?

SELLAR: Yes, I did a couple of consulting jobs, and wrote a paper on the first ten years of AID's experience with the democracy program. I was also the candidate of a couple of contractors for chief of party for long-term AID contracts, but we did not win either of these.

Q: What was the consulting job you did?

SELLAR: They were both in 1994. I served on a three-man team in Guyana that prepared a draft Project Paper for a democracy program there. I served as the quote institutional development specialist unquote and developed a program for strengthening civil society: community development, NGOs, the media, the university. My second job was in Nepal, where I served on a two-man team to review USAID Nepal's democratic development strategy, recommend any changes, and develop benchmarks or indicators for measuring the progress of the democracy program there.

Q: How did you find the consulting work as compared with being a direct-hire AID employee?

SELLAR: It had both pluses and minuses. The main plus was that the work was almost entirely substantive and hence extremely stimulating. It was also nice to be focused on just one task. Also, it paid very well. The negatives were the marketing that one had to do to get the jobs, and the utter unreliability of AID in scheduling the work or even confirming until the very last minute that I was going to be hired. In the case of the Nepal job, for instance, it was not until I got a call from the desk officer at the airport, after having made my way there through a blizzard, that I knew whether or not I was authorized to board the airplane. This made planning one's life around consulting jobs very difficult.

Q: What were the two long-term contract jobs that you didn't get?

SELLAR: The first was to be the Chief of Party (COP) for the regional component of a very large - $75 million, I think - project to improve the rule of law in Russia and certain former Soviet Union countries. I was neither a lawyer nor did I have any experience at all working in Russia, but my associates put me forward as their proposed COP because they felt the most important qualification was understanding how AID worked. They found a brilliant young man who had come to the U.S. from Ukraine when he was 14, who was

bilingual and a lawyer, to serve as my deputy. Between us we had all the necessary expertise. ABT's proposal got us into the “best-and-final” interview but we lost by two points to another bidder. We had a very strong consortium and organizations to carry out the program, yet we lost to a much weaker contractor. Later, I learned that the real reason we lost was that ABT had already won a major health contract in the region and AID wanted to spread the work around a bit. In retrospect, given what happened in Russia with the growth of lawlessness, it's probably fortunate we didn't win.

The second job I didn't get was as COP of a team to provide staff and advisers to AID's Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation. This was the same office I had worked in for four years back in the '70s. The Director, a friend who had been in my intern class entering AID, assured me that there would be a totally open competition despite the fact that there was an incumbent contractor. I was the candidate of Princeton Associates, a minority-owned firm that was bidding together with Louis Berger. It was a minority set-aside contract. We lost out to the incumbent. The AID review panel said that I and other personnel I had recommended were overqualified for the job. Later I learned that AID thought the incumbent was doing a good job and probably had no intention of hiring anyone else.

Q: You sound a bit caustic about both of these experiences.

SELLAR: Yes. In the second case I got sucked into spending quite a bit of time helping the contractors recommend personnel and develop the proposal. Since in both cases the decisions seemed to be made on other than the merits, I became wary of wasting more time on other candidacies. Also, AID would often cancel or defer signing of contracts at the last minute, so you never knew when or whether a job would materialize. So I decided after 1994-5, when all this was going on, to abandon the AID contracting world and go in an entirely different direction.

Q: What was that?

SELLAR: Financial planning. That's what I did until 1997, when I retired completely.

Q: Tell me a bit about the paper you wrote on AID's first 10 years working on democratic development. [See Annex F]

SELLAR: I wrote it for two reasons: as a thesis to complete my Master's degree at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy; and because I wanted to document the issues and problems that AID had encountered, and make some policy and operational recommendations that might influence AID to do a better job in the future.

Q: Can you summarize the paper very briefly and indicate what your recommendations were?

SELLAR: The paper is 86 pages long, so it will be hard to summarize it very briefly. What I did was track the development of the democracy program from its early beginnings in Central America through the point where every AID Regional Bureau was doing it, albeit in very different ways given the different regions, circumstances and viewpoints, and given the lack of any central AID leadership in this sector. I pointed out the major issues and differences encountered in developing this brand new program. One of the biggest problems was that AID had virtually no staff with substantive expertise in this field, and was very slow to develop it. Then I made about eight different recommendations involving policy, program, staff development, how to prioritize activities within the sector, and tasks for the new global office for democracy that was in the process of being created as I wrote the paper.

Q: Did the paper have any impact?

SELLAR: Well, I got a letter from the Senior Advisor to the Assistant Administrator for Program and Policy, thanking me for the paper and stating that a number of my recommendations were being or would be adopted. To what extent this happened or not I don't know. I suspect the letter was written in hopes of keeping me quiet, since the paper

in effect said that AID had really developed the democracy program without knowing what it was doing, and it would have been embarrassing to have this spread all over the Hill and elsewhere. The general impression I have is that the recommendations may have had some useful impact, but that for the most part AID was too understaffed and underfunded to really carry out most of them fully.

Concluding observations

Q: Well, let's take a few minutes to wrap up the interview. How do you assess your overall experiences in AID work?

SELLAR: Well, I thought it was, as Kennedy said back in 1963, “a proud and lively” career. At that time, like others, I felt very involved and idealistic about turning the world around in short order. Certainly the work we did was important, and certainly it was interesting. There were always different sectors that one had to try to master to some degree or other. To me, as an intellectual dilettante, I never got tired of that, and I particularly enjoyed things like working with the academics on the democracy strategies. There were arid spells along the way, of course. Certainly I should not have stayed in Near East DP for nine years.

Q: You had a problem with the way the personnel system operated, constantly having to move on in the earlier days before you really got established. You had nine years in one place, but you were locked in there and in the other cases you weren't there long enough. So, you said in one sense that the personnel system was not very effective in using its talented people.

SELLAR: Well, I don't think anybody's ever had anything very good to say about the AID personnel system, but at the same time, they were just responding to pressures that came from elsewhere in terms of RIFs.

Q: RIFs and the Obey Amendment and one thing or another. And reorganizations and so on.

SELLAR: Yes. I don't think that the personnel system had much to do with reorganizations. That would be a new Administrator or a new theory coming from somewhere. My career certainly does not look like the average Foreign Service Officer's career, where he spends two to four years in one country and then goes to another country for about the same time, interspersed with assignments in Washington.

Q: Your assignments were all very different.

SELLAR: Yes, but I didn't mind that. The Joint Commission job was an interesting one, but I have no passion for the Middle East really. I was happy to move to Latin America when I was moved. I was sorry to have to move out of it and I was glad to get back to it.

Q: Any universal lessons which stand out in your mind after all this time working on all these different kinds of programs in different parts of the world? In terms of what leads to effective programs and so on?

SELLAR: If you're asking particularly about my thoughts on what leads to an effective program, that would have to be a long answer, because there's so much analysis that really needs to go into a development project or program before you can have any assurance that it's going to be effective, especially in the long run. I think the agency itself went through a period of education where it started out really just worrying about project feasibility analysis, particularly in the capital projects, and then moved into the more heavily technical assistance, the softer sides. There were always issues in institutional development: whether one could achieve any lasting change by just taking a piece of the government, one ministry, and making it sort of a shining example of how things should work for a while, but meanwhile you're going to see pervasive incompetence and corruption everywhere else. Eventually that is going to drown out that one shining

example, particularly since in many cases, although there would have been provision for indigenization of the project, after a certain point local capabilities tended to diminish. In many cases we put returning participants into jobs too quickly and unrealistically expected that we could withdraw senior, experienced people too quickly.

Q: Essentially, are you saying that you needed a much more long term approach and perspective?

SELLAR: Yes, but we never really got to test that in too many cases, because of some unwritten rule that a project wasn't supposed to be more than five years long. Although it was common that there would be a follow-on project. I think that the agency at one point realized that it was missing out somehow on analyzing the local situation, and at that point hired a bunch of socialists and anthropologists.

Q: To learn more about the local setting?

SELLAR: Exactly. I think that was a step in the right direction. Although the anthropologists, I think, were a lot less useful than the sociologists, because they tended to plunge into one village and say that I need to stay here for five years before I really understand anything, and then it will probably be different in all of the other villages anyway. So, although there may have been some truth to this, it wavery hard to build a program on that. The thing that I think we failed to do, most of the time, was to really take into account how ineffectual and corrupt the governments were. That was something I think was brought out by writers like Robert Klitgaard, who was writing on Africa. His most famous book is Tropical Gangsters. That book really laid it out. Those problems are being addressed to some degree by the democracy program now, but in most cases we cannot do full-fledged civil service reform projects. We have to leave it to World Bank, and sometimes they do it and sometimes they don't. I think that's a very important constraint that we did not address early on. I think the projects did work better, certainly if they had

local involvement and awareness of the local culture. There was a time when we just dropped things on them from on high.

I remember seeing one project that was particularly bad on my first trip to Central America. It was a training program to teach people, I guess it may have had something to do with sanitation skills. They had a modern American kitchen in there with electric ranges and running water and all the things that 98 percent of the people in the country didn't have. One rather dazed looking Nicaraguan stood in the middle of it trying to explain what it was all about. That was egregiously bad project design, and AID, I think, fairly quickly moved beyond that in terms of sophistication. But it's hard for me to say, because I never looked back at anything I'd been working on, five or ten years later.

I did have a chance to look back at what we'd been doing in Nepal for 20 years in that one evaluation I told you about. But, normally I didn't do that sort of thing, so I honestly can't tell you how much of our program worked and how much of it didn't. Certainly in the human development area the training has to have done some good. Although there's a funny story about how we set up a crackerjack statistical unit to work in Iran when we still had an Iran program, to improve the data that everybody always assumed we had, but which in fact we didn't have. Then Iran had its revolution and the statistical unit disappeared, only however to emerge virtually intact in Turkey. So, our objective was to improve the statistic capability in Iran and wound up being in Turkey.

Q: You mean the people just moved over there?

SELLAR: Yes. Our objective was accomplished, but in another country. Was this success or failure? Also, I don't know how many of the people that we trained were actually able to use their skills and did or did not become part of the problem themselves. I've heard people, even very recently, talk about that problem. I went to a session over in Rosslyn at the Tulane Graduate School's program here. They had some of their students there. One guy from Africa was saying quite candidly, what choices do I have? Do I try to stay

here or in the developed world? Do I go back to my country and if I do, you know, I'll just have to become part of the system. So I guess your question initially was, what was my assessment of what had worked and hadn't worked. I'm giving you a sort of jumbled answer, but it's the best I can do.

Q: There are so many issues that are involved and you can expand on it. Would you say, looking back over the AID and the Foreign Assistance Program, that it made a difference in international development or would you say, as some people say, that the money just evaporated and it didn't do anything.

SELLAR: I think it made a difference. I mean, you look at the World Bank statistics on improvement in human welfare over the past three decades: Health indicators, education indicators, per capita GNP, and so forth. There definitely has been a significant improvement in most parts of the world. I guess Africa is kind of the laggard, but there's even some improvement there in some cases now. Nobody knows how to disaggregate how much of the improvement is attributable to the IBRD, to the U.S., to other donors, to the host country and so on, but as one of the major donors, I don't see why we can't take our share of the credit for the improvements. I don't think that our program was noticeably worse than other donor programs. I think it was much better than the U.N. program and different from the World Bank program. They're sort of a big battleship, if you will, or aircraft carrier type program. Huge, but very hard to turn around or change. We are more of a light cruiser or a destroyer and had more flexibility and more agility.

Q: In what areas do you think AID has been most innovative, if any, over the years?

SELLAR: Well, certainly we got an awful lot of credit for the Green Revolution. I think that's deserved; we supported a lot of the research that was done at the International Rice Institute. That had, of course, a very major impact in terms of grain production in India and Bangladesh, and turned them around from being heavy importers to being at least self-sufficient, even exporters in good years. I think that the claims that were made for

the child survival program as it was publicized under Peter McPherson, were justifiable. This package that we developed of oral rehydration saved millions of lives, and certainly other medical programs that we did saved more millions of lives in terms of smallpox eradication and huge reductions in measles and some of the other diseases that killed so many children. Those are the two that come to mind. And we certainly have contributed through our family planning programs to reductions in population growth, a very important matter. Then, there are many other smaller examples.

I know that the democracy program, which is much more recent, has had some real impact. There are other donors doing it, but I think we did lead the way. The paper that I wrote on our experience, although used on the Hill to great effect, was actually written for the Development Assistance Committee at the OECD, because they were getting interested in democracy aid and wanted to know what we'd learned. One job I had as a consultant after returning from AID was to assess the validity of the Nepal democracy strategy and recommend any changes, and also to set up indicators for measuring progress of the program. That obviously involved finding out what the other donors were doing, and the Danes had a pretty substantial program. So you would find some other countries doing it. Of course, once the World Bank got over its hangup about political interventions, they were doing things that contributed to democracy. I think it got picked up on by most of the Regional Banks, and private organizations were supported and able to do more than they had done before in human rights and a whole number of areas.

Q: Well, do you have any final concluding remarks you want to add to this in wrapping up your experience or your thoughts about development?

SELLAR: Well, I think that my experience was, on the whole, a positive one. I look back on my career and I feel that I was lucky enough to be at various times on the cutting edge of something, particularly with the PVOs and with the democracy program, which made it very rewarding. Even the routine work of reviewing projects and programs and trying to get them approved was interesting most of the time. I would have preferred to have

spent less time in Near East DP and more time in some other places. I think that the Obey experience did affect my career and my attitude somewhat adversely. But I feel that I was moderately successful and have some accomplishments I can point to. I also feel that, when I decided in graduate school that development was going to be one of the great tasks of my generation, that I was right. In fact, I felt we might be done by now, but obviously we're not.

Q: Okay. Well, that's a good thought for us to conclude with. Thank you very much. It's been an excellent interview.

End of interview